

**THE FUTURE OF SECULARITY AND AMERICAN POLITICS IN AN
ENTANGLED DEMOCRACY**

by
Tatianna Carpenter

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Abstract

Societal changes often reflect politically, especially in a democracy. American politics are being impacted by shifts favoring secularism in the religious landscape. For most of America's history, Christianity dominated the religious landscape. Arguably, the founding fathers did not intend for America to be a secular republic. However, with the religious liberty they granted society, the religious beliefs of American citizens reflect such freedom along with the freedom to practice no religion at all. Progressive policies are leading to the implementation of a stricter church-state separation, and trends favoring secularism are significant in theorizing what the future of American politics will look like. Coalesced research from a myriad of scholars establish a sense of consistency and agreement throughout academia. These theories are supported by statistical data, scholarly articles, and public opinion surveys that present the percentages and pace at which religious affiliation is declining in America. While the future is unpredictable, this thesis expresses how and why America is expected to govern and be governed by a secular democracy in order for our nation's democracy to thrive.

Thesis Reviewers: Dr. Dorothea Wolfson & Dr. Kathryn Wagner Hill

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Introduction

America from the beginning of the nation has aspired to be the land of the free to guarantee liberty and justice for all. Since the founding of the republic, America has also incorporated religion into its traditions. Philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville is famous for his observations of the fledgling American democracy, and the founding generation would agree that liberty cannot be established without morality, nor morality without faith. Presidents throughout American history and up to the present day have uttered the words, “God bless America,” at the end of their notable speeches. Most political leaders have Christian backgrounds, although America was not founded as a Christian nation. Nonetheless, Christianity is rooted in American society. This has led scholars, theorists, political scientists, and everyday citizens to question what American culture would be without it.

Today’s religious landscape is leading to these concerns because the current religious landscape is shifting. Statistics reflect a decrease in the number of Americans who are religious, and recent studies show that 35% of adults in the millennial generation are religiously unaffiliated. As a result, the term religious “nones” was developed in reference to the citizens practicing atheism or agnosticism, or whose religion is “nothing in particular”¹. “Nones” possess different beliefs than those of atheists and agnostics, but they are consistently growing and represent an increasing percentage of the population. In fact, political scientists claim that the millennial

¹ Lipka, Michael. “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones'.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015.

generation is the catalyst for the growth of “nones” as these trends are expected to be generational.² The changes within the religious landscape are impacting the political landscape.

Questions about the future of American politics in a secularly dominated democracy are the focus of this thesis: Does the First Amendment [encourage] a doctrine of national secularism?³ What characterizes “establishment,” “religion,” “prohibiting,” and “free exercise”?⁴ What were the intentions of the founding fathers? Would they have accepted a secular political system considering today’s religious landscape? Will the quest for secular redemption doom the American idea?⁵ Each chapter explores these questions and assesses the implications of the answers to them for the emergence of secular politics. The views that the founding generation had on religious liberty are reflected in the founding documents, and in some ways, complements the potentiality of this emergence.

The first chapter, *A Secular or Entangled Democracy*, provides a sense of background and perspective on the religious influence during the nation’s founding and the intentions of the founders of the republic. Also, it examines how the founders’ views regarding religious liberty have carried into today’s society with the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville providing a sort of bridge for this. For some people, the entanglement between religion and politics leads them to questions about the stability of

² Lipka, Michael. “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones'.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015.

³ AEIdeas. “Is the United States a Secular Country?” AEI, December 5, 2019. <https://www.aei.org/society-and-culture/is-the-united-states-a-secular-country/>.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Hamid, Shadi. “America Without God.” The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, March 11, 2021. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2021/04/america-politics-religion/618072/>.

American democracy if there is eventually no intersection of the two. Specifically, Tocqueville's belief that religious utility has been an important factor in American exceptionalism has led to skepticism about the stability of American democracy without religion. The literature review for this chapter aims to provide a better understanding of the founding generation and the consensus views that emerged by exploring the following founders; Roger Williams, George Calvert, also known as Lord Baltimore, William Penn, John Locke, Thomas Paine, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and George Washington.

Tocqueville is credited for bringing about such questions and speculation about religious mores and utility. However, the founding fathers are credited for establishing what religious liberty truly means and what the original intentions were. Amongst the various views of the founders, consensus views in favor of non-establishment and religious liberty determine their intentions. Further connections and commonalities can be made regarding the founders' intentions for religious society and civil society to be two separate entities. Understanding the actual intentions of the founders helps one better understand the crafting of the founding documents. Additionally, it aids in deciphering whether secularism can and should be embraced, even if the founders would not support today's social trends. Further, it explores religious liberty and the relationship between secularization and liberalism.

The second chapter, *American Politics in a Secular Democracy*, dissects the religious landscape in America, the implications of these changes, and it explores potential reasons why religious affiliation is declining while secularism is increasing. By researching trends including atheism in American society, this chapter determines that

policy advocacy, generational influences, and intolerance are driving factors that are influencing secularism. Surveys and statistics show that Christianity still comprises the majority of the American population. However, as religious affiliation declines, arguments regarding American politics and religion have increased. Compared to previous decades, the percentage of Americans that attended church or some religious service on a weekly basis has dropped drastically resulting in the sharpest decline in church participation in America's history. Although America still leads with the number of religious services held weekly, most generational cohorts are becoming less religiously affiliated as they age.⁶

Furthermore, today's religious shifts are changing the trajectory of politics in American democracy as recent research shows that millennials are less religious than older Americans. Studies show that most secularists have liberal views and are Democrats while most religionists have conservative views and are Republicans,⁷ predicting that more polarization may be a result of the secular trend in America. Fear is another dividing factor as religion in America feels threatened, especially for conservatives.

Amongst the many definitions of secularism, one distinct definition complements the separation of church and state; "Denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis; not subject or bound by religious rule."⁸ The third

⁶ Lipka, Michael. "Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones'." Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ "Secularism in America: Secular Progressive Outreach: United States." Secular Progressive. <https://www.spoutlink.org/>.

chapter, *Progressive Implementations in the Church-State Separation*, focuses on social and legal changes in American society. Public policy issues that are opposed by traditional Christianity reflect the waning religious influence in American politics. Additionally, it contributes to the increase of legal and social acceptance of practices involving abortion and homosexuality/transgenderism which are opposed by traditional Christianity. Further, it examines specific Supreme Court cases in which progressive policies and laws serve as a force that challenge and implement the concept of separation of church and state.

As generations pass, America is becoming more diverse and more highly educated. With that being said, different public policy issues and societal changes arise, and in turn, new concerns will generate advocacy efforts and the entire population expects equal results and representation. As a result, these foreshadowed issues are at the forefront of American politics accompanied by demands for change and government reform. Today, there are many examples of the political gains the secular community has received in their fight for equality that have contributed to the religious-secular debate. The reader explores Supreme Court decisions and the criteria articulated for them in the following cases; *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Abington School District v. Schempp*, *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020).

All of these cases focus on progressive issues that minimize the importance of religion in politics, including education, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights which are often opposed by traditional Christianity. Because of the founding documents, the government does not have the power to base laws on religious teachings and/or beliefs.

It is suspected that the secular portion of the population will elect secular/nonreligious candidates, especially with the help of religious secularists that support liberal, progressive policy issues despite ways in which they might contradict religious beliefs. As a result, there is a need to rethink the terms “secular” and “religious,” their history, the relationship between the two, and their concrete embodiment in American life.

Over the course of this research, it has become clear that secularity and secularism have different meanings. However, one consistent understanding of what it means to be secular is the personal decision to be unrelated or neutral with regards to religion and irreligion. The words “unrelated” and “neutral” are important to understand what it means to be secular and when deciding whether American society can thrive in a secular political system. While some secularists are completely unattached and opposed to any religious denominations, there are other secularists that are neither helping nor hindering either side.

Based on the overall findings of this analysis, a need for reconstruction is emerging. Religion is embedded in American politics, but the growing portion of non-religious Americans is expected to continuously increase at a rapid level. To best achieve a balance between majority rule and minority rights on the religious question, the secular political system must be embraced. The founding documents support this possibility although such legal and societal changes are a subversion of the original vision of the founding generation.

The First Amendment to The U.S. Constitution is referenced on a daily basis because of its importance in America. It contains the most fundamental rights

guaranteed for American citizens. Regarding religion, it states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. The original intention of the First Amendment was to prevent a national religion from being established and stop the federal government from interfering with establishments of religion in the states. However, the meaning of this amendment has been dissected and observed word for word to pinpoint flaws and flexibility within such vital statements.

The Establishment Clause and the Free Exercise Clause support secularism whether it was originally intended to or not. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment prohibits the government from establishing a national religion.⁹ The Free Exercise Clause of the First Amendment, grants the freedom of conscience and protects religious liberty. Under this clause, governmental regulation of religious beliefs, invasions by civil authority, and misuse of secular governmental programs are prohibited.¹⁰ With freedom of religion, there must be the freedom to choose not to practice any religion at all. The same freedom is granted within the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (P.L. 103-141) which ensures that interests in religious freedom are protected. With religious freedom and the increase of secularization, there are

⁹ "First Amendment and Religion." United States Courts. <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/first-amendment-and-religion>.

¹⁰ McConnell, and Marshall. "Free Exercise Clause: OVERVIEW: Constitution Annotated: CONGRESS.GOV: Library of Congress." Constitution Annotated. https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/amdt1_1_4_1/.

citizens that do not hold the same religious values or even have reverence for religious aspects of American culture.

The No Religious Test Clause under Article VI, Section 3 of the Constitution protects all religions practiced amongst the American population. It explicitly states, “The Senators and Representatives before mentioned, and the Members of the several State Legislatures, and all executive and judicial Officers, both of the United States and of the several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this Constitution; but no religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States.” The importance of this vital part of American history is the fact that it supports a possibility of secular politics, and specifically, federal office holders and employees, and secular candidates or candidates who do not practice Christianity. Also, in the original seven articles, this is the only clause that directly addresses religion. Furthermore, it substantiates the fact that the government does not have the power to enforce any specific religion, and this was declared during the founding of the nation. Regardless of God’s influence on the nation, the founding documents do not prevent the emergence of a population that chooses not to practice any religion at all.

As shifts in the religious and political landscapes continue, America is struggling to find new ways to make religion and politics compatible and mutually reinforcing. Nevertheless, it is important to understand that the decrease in religious affiliation does not mean that religion in America will completely vanish altogether. Instead, it suggests that secularists are causing a need for alterations in the way American politics operate which could lead to secular politics. One can be religious and still advocate for social

and legal changes that contradict their religious beliefs. Therefore, this research suggests that there can be a convergence between the two.

The contribution of this research is furthering our understanding of religious and secular influences in American society, particularly in the context of the founding documents, and the necessity of church-state enforcement. This paper explores secularity in America, what that means for contemporary American politics, and how it is possible for the religious and nonreligious portions of society to coexist in American democracy.

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Chapter One: A Secular or Entangled Democracy

Tatianna Carpenter

Johns Hopkins University

Introduction: French diplomat, historian, and political scientist, Alexis de Tocqueville, was a French aristocrat philosopher who notably acknowledged religion's influence in America. Alexis de Tocqueville was able to recognize the spirit of religion in America compared to religion in his native home of France. One of the leading factors Tocqueville recognized in America's ability to sustain a stable democracy was due to church-mindedness and religious mores. Religious mores determine what is considered morally acceptable or unacceptable within any given culture. At the same time, in more secular countries, more secular values would tend to be an influence. Nevertheless, the combination of religion and liberty were two forces that clashed in most nations but worked together in America. His recognition of this was influenced by common fears and concerns of State establishments of religion interfering with religious denominations and practices. Centuries later, it is hard to tell how accurate Tocqueville was in his observations. While many of his observations remain true, many of them do not.

In the past, other nations struggled to sustain democracy because of religion. When people did not feel accepted, they felt the need to flee from State control to have the freedom of practicing their religion. In Europe, religion tended to be associated with support for the monarchies and nobility, and the liberal-democratic movements tended to be more secular. Tocqueville was able to identify these differences between European culture and American culture. He admired the shared knowledge and respect for religion in America and how that awareness created a powerful force for the American government. Tocqueville's connection between American religion and liberty emphasizes the foundation religion set in the past and religion's influence in America.

The views of the founding fathers emerged out of a common recognition for the religious wars that Tocqueville also recognized. Like Tocqueville, the founders viewed religion as a necessary vehicle for the inculcation of moral virtues in society. However, the impact that religious wars and persecutions had on European society led the founders to desire a political system that did not restrict religious freedom. As a result, religious liberty was viewed as a way to prevent citizens from fleeing as a result of discrimination and persecution.

This belief that religious utility has been an important factor in American exceptionalism is a catalyst for scholars questioning the stability of American democracy without religion. Nations and their attitudes are primarily shaped by their history. Therefore, Tocqueville's argument is so concrete that it has led scholars to question America's ability to sustain a stable democracy without religion intertwining with liberty. Acceptance, religious freedom, and policy advocacy have led to the division of the religious landscape and politics in America. These shifts have led citizens, scholars, and political scientists to question how secularization impacts American democracy. This paper will examine how the intentions of the founders regarding religious liberty have carried into today's society, especially considering the observations of Alexis de Tocqueville.

Literature Review: Although there is no single viewpoint amongst the founders, similarities in their views on religious freedom have allowed a consensus view in favor of non-establishment and religious freedom to emerge. Louis Fisher classified religious liberty as a political safeguard. In *Religious Liberty in America: Political Safeguards*, the author discusses the struggle for religious liberty in the second chapter of the book.

Fisher credits the political process opposed to the judicial process for being the catalyst for “creating and preserving religious liberty”¹¹ in America. Early on, he also acknowledges that the founders intentions for religious liberty was crafted from their hearts and minds and that it was their willingness to advocate for their beliefs despite any repercussions such as facing exile and suffering punishment. It was their willingness to confront authority that led America to the First Amendment ruling of the Constitution that congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances. However, what the founders didn’t realize is how “reactive and marginal”¹² that would be for politics.

To exemplify these reactive and marginal effects, consider the entanglement between civil and religious society which stemmed from government financial support for churches. This was the main religious-liberty issue in the founders’ generation because the churches depended on government money, and the evangelicals wanted to end it.¹³ Nevertheless, this issue was resolved in the past by establishing an understanding that the government does not pay for the religious functions of churches. However, there’s nothing new under the sun, and old issues tend to come back in new ways. Since the founding generation, new concerns have surfaced regarding this entanglement; “Can the government pay for secular services—education, social

¹¹ Fisher, Louis *Religious Liberty In America: Political Safeguards*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ “Religious Liberty at the Founding.” National Constitution Center – constitutioncenter.org.
<https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/religious-liberty-at-the-founding>.

services, medical care—delivered by religious organizations, often in a religious environment?”¹⁴

In more recent relations to these controversial questions, during the presidency of George W. Bush, the role of faith-based and community organizations was strengthened and expanded under his administration. Bush believed that partnerships between government and religious groups were necessary to stabilize not only American democracy, but American society as well. In *Church-State Partnerships: Some Reflections from Washington, D.C.* by Carol J. De Vita and Pho Palmer of the Urban Institute, the authors stated, “The purpose of the faith-based initiatives is to allow religious groups to compete with other community- based charities for government funds without downplaying or hiding their religious character, as long as the funds are not spent on worship or proselytizing.” Further, they explain those efforts under Bush’s administration in which the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives was developed.

Eventually, Bush’s executive orders led to the development of the Centers on Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in eight federal agencies which include the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Education, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, and Labor, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)¹⁵. According to the authors of the Urban Institute, the intended audience these orders were supposed to benefit were vulnerable populations, namely at-risk youth and prisoners, elders in need,

¹⁴ “Religious Liberty at the Founding.” National Constitution Center – [constitutioncenter.org](https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/religious-liberty-at-the-founding).
<https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/religious-liberty-at-the-founding>.

¹⁵ Vita, Carol J. De. “Church-State Partnerships.” Urban Institute, May 4, 2020.
<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/church-state-partnerships>.

the homeless, substance abusers, and welfare-to-work families. Despite the intention, Congress faced controversy about the “legal, funding, and accountability issues”¹⁶ that resulted from these actions which is expected when religion and politics are intertwined. The main issue was the fact that the funding wasn’t particularly reaching the intended audiences.

Moving forward, throughout Fisher’s book, the author discussed the viewpoints of a few of the founding fathers regarding religious liberty. According to Fisher, Roger Williams, founder of Providence and author of the first articles of incorporation, intended for religious society and civil society to be two separate entities. Fisher furthered by reciting the words of Williams; “As it would be confusion for the church to censure such matters and acts of such persons as belong not to the church; so it is confusion for the state to punish spiritual offenses, for they are not within the sphere of civil jurisdiction.”¹⁷ Williams objected Puritan doctrines and policies which included compulsory attendance at religious services and taxes supporting the ministry. Instead, he advocated for church-state separation because he believed that religion was a matter of personal conscience, and he extended political authority only in civil matters.

Additionally, the founding father George Calvert, also known as Lord Baltimore, who founded Maryland, had similar intentions. Fisher acknowledged an act of 1649 in which religious liberty flourished beyond Maryland. The act stated that no person who believes in Jesus Christ would be punished for their religion nor exercising their

¹⁶ Vita, Carol J. De. “Church-State Partnerships.” Urban Institute, May 4, 2020. <https://www.urban.org/research/publication/church-state-partnerships>.

¹⁷ Fisher, Louis *Religious Liberty In America: Political Safeguards*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

religion.¹⁸ Considering the times, these were liberal actions although they may not be considered religious liberty in today's era.

William Penn advocated for non-coercion of conscience and the cooperation of the church and state in fostering levels of morality which he believed was necessary for prosperity and good government.¹⁹ He led religious liberty in Pennsylvania which came under certain conditions; a person had to “confess and acknowledge *One* almighty God the Creator, Upholder and Ruler of the world”²⁰ in order to be exempt from molestation or prejudice “because of conscientious persuasion or practice, not to be compelled to frequent or maintain any religious worship, or to suffer any other act contrary to their religious persuasion.”²¹ Further, people in government positions could only hold their titles if they believed in Jesus Christ. Another notable act of Penn was establishing a day of rest and religious observance which many Christian Americans still participate in today.

John Locke influenced many of the founders during his time. He considered toleration as “the chief characteristical mark of the true church.”²² Fisher explained that Locke believed that all people, even those who didn't believe in Christ, deserved to be treated with kindness because cruel punishments out of intolerance did not align with the Christian religion. Like many of the founding fathers, Locke understood the need for distinct separation of church and state. To him, the role of the state concerned life, liberty, health, and personal possessions and properties. He encouraged religious

¹⁸ Fisher, Louis *Religious Liberty In America: Political Safeguards*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

liberty including the right to open dialogue in society as long as it did not lead to penalties which supported his concept of persuasion over persecution. To Locke, religious beliefs were not generational, but instead, individual and personal stating that “Faith only, and inward sincerity, are the things that procure acceptance with God.”²³

Many of the founders studied Locke’s work on religious liberty to influence their writings. As a result, they were able to find the flaws and conflicting viewpoints within Locke’s concept of toleration. According to Fisher, Thomas Paine thought that intolerance was a poor imitation of toleration,²⁴ and Thomas Jefferson and James Madison thought that the magistrate did not possess the authority to be neither tolerant nor intolerant. Madison believed that the concept of “toleration” reflected grace, and therefore, it needed to be removed in order to promote a fundamental human right.²⁵ Jefferson credited Locke’s knowledge of religious freedom, but he felt the need to pick up where he left off and right some of Locke’s wrongs. Although Jefferson and Madison did not agree with Locke’s views on toleration, they agreed with Locke’s idea of religious liberty.

James Madison wrote his *Memorial and Remonstrance* where he expressed his beliefs that it was not the government’s job to interfere with issues regarding religion. He believed morality should stand alone. Because God is king, clergy, no other authorities or secular communities possessed despotism over religious freedom since church-state relations did not contribute to civil society or even Christianity. It was not the place for

²³ Fisher, Louis *Religious Liberty In America: Political Safeguards*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

civil or secular authorities to regulate religious truth. Instead, he felt that religion should be left to the conviction and conscience of the individual.

Thomas Jefferson believed in the need for independence which is reflected in the Declaration of Independence in which he is considered the primary author of such a critical founding document in American politics. His intention was to express the unity of Americans in terms of independence, liberty, and freedom. As a result, the Declaration of Independence promotes and secures the right to self-government and individual rights, and it is referenced on a daily basis in American society. Additionally, Jefferson wrote *The Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom* which states that God created the human mind free, and “manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint.”²⁶

Like Locke, Jefferson’s beliefs on religious freedom continue to hold relevance today. Jefferson’s knowledge was also reflected in *Reynolds v. United States* which addressed the religion clauses of the First Amendment. In this case, the Supreme Court agreed that Jefferson’s Statute for Religious Freedom “defined” religious liberty and “the true distinction between what properly belongs to the church and what to the State.”²⁷ His Statute for Religious Freedom is known to reflect his commitment to America’s founding.

Moreover, today’s society resonates more with the views of Madison than other central founders that opposed these beliefs. Religion is a free choice, and religious views depend on the person individually, not the government. Like Jefferson, he

²⁶ Thomas Jefferson. *Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom* (1776)

²⁷ “Monticello.” Thomas Jefferson and Religious Freedom. Accessed June 21, 2021.
<https://www.monticello.org/site/research-and-collections/thomas-jefferson-and-religious-freedom>

believes in religious liberty, the right to be free and choose what to believe, and he views religion as a personal preference. However, that does not mean that political scientists and scholars have not questioned the benefits liberalism has on religion. Thomas Jefferson and James Madison intended for religious freedom to prevent the government from enforcing the doctrines of powerful religious factions and give people the right to be free and choose what to believe when religion is accepted as a personal preference. This flexibility has led to religious “nones” who seem to believe in God, even if they are not personally members of organized religious faith.

As a result of the religiously unaffiliated population of America feeling unaccepted, the conflict between religion and politics has increased. More and more, America is struggling to find new ways to make religion and politics compatible and mutually reinforcing. Consequently, religious affiliation is decreasing drastically, and the Pew Research study, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, substantiates such claims. In this study, the religiously unaffiliated American population percentage consisted of people who described their religious identity as atheist, agnostic, or “nothing in particular.” Over one decade, the number of religious “nones” has increased by nearly 30 million. There has been a 12 percent decrease in American adults describing themselves as Christians when asked about their religion.²⁸ The percentages suggest that religious disaffiliation is a growing trend in America. The

²⁸ In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace. (2020, June 09). <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

population's religiously unaffiliated share increased by 17 percent over one decade, standing at 26 percent.²⁹

Pew Research suggests that Protestantism and Catholicism are experiencing the most significant population share losses amongst all religions. They stated, "Currently, 43% of U.S. adults identify with Protestantism, down from 51% in 2009. And one-in-five adults (20%) are Catholic, down from 23% in 2009."³⁰ While Protestantism and Catholicism are shrinking, all subsets of the religiously unaffiliated are growing. Regardless, the demographics of people who are becoming religiously unaffiliated reflect diversity and prove that the trends in religious disaffiliation are broad-based. Additional studies from Pew Research conclude that the unaffiliated portion of the population, and especially those who are atheist or agnostic, tend to diverge from the general public when it comes to attitudes about the role of religion in politics, do not possess the same levels of importance for a president to have strong religious beliefs, and they are more uncomfortable with political candidates discussing their faith or religious commitment.³¹

With that being said, Pew Research reports, "Six-in-ten religiously unaffiliated Americans – adults who describe their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or "nothing in particular" – say the questioning of religious teachings is a fundamental reason for their lack of affiliation. The second-most-common reason is opposition to the positions

²⁹ In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace. (2020, June 09). <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ "Social and Political Views of the Unaffiliated." Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project, December 31, 2019. <https://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise-social-and-political-views/>.

taken by churches on social and political issues.”³² Other relevant reasons from unaffiliated Americans were dislike for religious organizations and religious leaders, a lack of belief in God, and not seeing the relevance of religion, overall. The variety of reasons for choosing not to affiliate with religion suggests that religious “nones” are not a monolithic group and that these beliefs could have stemmed from having the religious freedom to choose. Overall, the state had no role in the original intentions of many of the founders for religious liberty in America. Although it may not have been intended or expected, reflecting on the words of Tocqueville, it is not surprising that religious freedom and liberty has led to a decline in religious affiliation.

Presentation and Discussion of Results: Tocqueville stated, “America is the only country in which it has been possible to witness the natural and tranquil growth of society, and where the influence exercised on the future condition of states by their origin is clearly distinguishable.”³³ Observing today’s growth of society, it has been proven that millennials are less religious than previous generations. The term religious “nones” developed to address the religiously unaffiliated population who are practicing atheism or agnosticism or whose religion is “nothing in particular.”³⁴ Further studies show that religious “nones” are more likely to identify as atheists over the years and that

³² “Why America's 'Nones' Don't Identify with a Religion,” July 23, 2020.

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>.

³³ Alexis de Tocqueville & Henry Reeve. “Chapter II - Origin of the Anglo-Americans—Part I.” “Democracy in America.” iBooks. Pg. 101, Vol. 1.

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³⁴ Lipka, Michael. “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones'.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>

the percentage of "nones" who do not believe in God increased by 50 percent over seven years.³⁵

The lack of an established church in America has allowed people to explore and choose from all religious groups which also left room for people to decline certain religions and/or choose to practice no religion at all, even if this was not the intention of the founding generation. Statistics suggest that religious freedom has weakened religion, and it has led to opposition to religion overall. In fact, the majority of all religious "nones" were raised in a religion and chose to become unaffiliated³⁶ which substantiates John Locke's belief that religious affiliation is individual, not generational. With that being said, in this sense Tocqueville's beliefs acknowledged the importance of religious freedom and the chance of people choosing to practice other religions over Christianity, but he denied liberalism over time could weaken religion overall and lead to secularism as the European conservatives had feared.

In the words of Tocqueville, "The men of our day seem destined to see further than their predecessors into human events; they are close enough to the founding of the American settlements to know in detail their elements, and far enough away from that time already to be able to judge what these beginnings have produced."³⁷ Nevertheless, despite the history and beginnings that Tocqueville acknowledged and admired in American society, that foundation has also changed the trajectory and found new

³⁵ Johnson, Rev. Ben. (2020). How socialism causes atheism. <https://www.acton.org/religion-liberty/volume-29-number-3/how-socialism-causes-atheism>

³⁶ "Why America's 'Nones' Don't Identify with a Religion," July 23, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/08/why-americas-nones-dont-identify-with-a-religion/>.

³⁷ Alexis de Tocqueville & Henry Reeve. "Chapter II - Origin of the Anglo-Americans—Part I." "Democracy in America." iBooks. Pg. 102, Vol. 1. <https://books.apple.com/us/book/democracy-in-america/id376782206>

meaning in today's society. Tocqueville also expressed his belief that "equality makes men want to form their own opinions; but, on the other hand, it imbues them with the taste and the idea of unity, simplicity, and impartiality in the power that governs society."³⁸ Further, he even suggested that people living in democratic times could be very prone to reject religious authority. Tocqueville knew that with equality and acceptance comes opinion. With respect to those differences he understood that there should be several religions, not just one. In this sense, Tocqueville was accurate, and the founding documents crafted by the founding generation reflect this notion.

With that being said, it is important to acknowledge that despite advocating for religious freedom, the founding fathers of the nation did not favor an entirely secular or non-religious society. Non-establishment does not necessarily suggest that the founders intended for the religious landscape to favor secular or nonreligious influences. Instead, it reflects their caution about the ways in which church-state establishments were a threat to devout practice of faith. Amongst the founders, there was a common understanding that political force lacked positive results when enforcing belief which influenced their views on religious freedom.

While the founding fathers did not share the same views entirely on religion in America, there were commonalities within their beliefs that can allow a consensus view to emerge. For example, they believed that America needed separation of the church and the state in order to thrive and properly function in the new republic. The role of the

³⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville & Henry Reeve. "Chapter VI - Of the Progress of Roman Catholicism in the United States." "Democracy in America." iBooks. Pg. 1,183, Vol. 2.
<https://books.apple.com/us/book/democracy-in-america/id376782206>

government was to maintain civility, peace, and justice. Another consistent argument was that citizens should not be forced to participate in financial distributions that support the ministry. Additionally, the founders commonly advocated for conscience and its entanglement with morality to form a stable foundation. In fact, John Locke viewed conscience as “a realm so inherent and personal that no outside force is authorized to violate it.”³⁹ At the same time, there were broad views amongst the founders when observing morality’s intersection with religion, cautioning against the notion that there can be a moral society that is not also religious.

Most of the founding fathers thought of religious influence on American culture as a positive in terms of instilling morality. With that being said, religion was originally viewed as a way to provide support for an enduringly free society. For example, many of the founders would agree with Alexander Hamilton’s assessment that religion is vital to a free society because religion inculcates virtuous self-restraint and without self-restraint, society will end up being restrained by autocrats.⁴⁰ He believed that morality must fall with religion, and George Washington’s Farewell Address reflects his agreement with Hamilton. Washington considered religion and morality to be “indispensable supports.”⁴¹ Further, James Madison recognized religious liberty’s importance to the health of the democratic republic, and therefore, wanted to equally protect religion from the corruption of politics. Nevertheless, these sentiments suggest that a religiously unaffiliated society as a whole was not the fulfillment of the original

³⁹ Fisher, Louis *Religious Liberty In America: Political Safeguards*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

⁴⁰ Alexander Hamilton. The Stand. April 7, 1798
<https://founders.archives.gov/documents/Hamilton/01-21-02-0233>

⁴¹ George Washington. Farewell Address. (1796) https://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/washing.asp

vision of the founders. Therefore, they would not favor today's social and religious trends considering their insistence on the principle of religious freedom despite how it has been carried out in today's society.

Beyond the views of the nation's founders, more recent debates concerning religious freedom have arisen. Because of the shifts in the religious landscape, libertarianism and religious freedom have been studied in a new light that explores the potential impacts that secularization could have on American democracy. Although liberalism promotes individual rights, civil liberties, democracy, and free enterprise, secularists advocate for the separation of religion from civic affairs and the state. Some citizens want to consider religious belief irrelevant and force the religious communities to practice their beliefs privately, not publicly. Others are fighting to preserve religious influence in America as the founders intended.

The belief that liberalism is destroying traditional religious belief is reflected by political scientist, Patrick Deneen. He argues that "when liberalism dissolves our moral commitments to one another and stigmatizes our faith communities, it is being true to itself."⁴² On the other hand, author David French considers liberalism in the sense of the freedoms of the American order as a vital step forward in human history. French argues that the "common good"⁴³ of individual liberty must trump the individual interest. In *Against Christian Authoritarianism*, he states, "In reality, the period when the United

⁴² Akyol, Joseph Loconte and Mustafa. "Is Liberalism Good for Religions?" Cato Institute, August 13, 2019. <https://www.cato.org/policy-report/julyaugust-2019/liberalism-good-religions>.

⁴³ French, David. "Against Christian Authoritarianism." The French Press. The Dispatch, April 5, 2020. <https://frenchpress.thedispatch.com/p/against-christian-authoritarianism-90c?token=eyJ1c2VyX2kljoyMDU0MzU5LCJwb3N0X2kljozNTE5MzYsIl8iOiI5MVZPWCIslmIhdCI6MTU04NjE5MDE4MywiZXhwIjoxNTg2MTIzNzg2LCJpc3MiOiJwdWltMjE3NjUiLCJzdWIiOiJwb3N0LXJlYWw0aW9uIn0.6XrYDbJ8dMxm6oEddKeQNOQmY26HjjOmoPYkMFwrFbw>

States most abandoned the common good were the days before we extended the blessings of liberty to all our nation's people," acknowledging that the founding documents guarantee justice for *all*. To him, liberalism is "a technology for preventing civil war."⁴⁴

French acknowledges that liberalism in the sense of the freedoms of the American order defends Christians among others in their freedom to believe and practice. As a result, he cautions that the critiques of liberalism threaten to generate a Christian form of authoritarianism. However, could the impact of secularization on American democracy lead to a total change in America's form of government? French is referring to censorship on the public expression of opinions as a result of secularization, which is an authoritarian regime. However, the ideology of authoritarianism versus the ideology of democracy is two extremely different political systems. In a democracy, the majority of the voters make decisions, which often leads to criticism from the minorities because of the fundamental rights granted within the founding documents.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that religious people advocate for these liberal-democratic or progressive issues, too. An equally important note is that a lack of religious affiliation does not necessarily mean that secularists lack morality or the ability to decipher right from wrong. As the American religious and political landscapes evolve, so has moral acceptability due to Americans becoming more liberal on social issues.

The social evolutions of today's society include views that gay and lesbian relations are

⁴⁴ French, David. "Against Christian Authoritarianism." The French Press. The Dispatch, April 5, 2020. <https://frenchpress.thedispatch.com/p/against-christian-authoritarianism-90c?token=eyJ1c2VyX2lkjoyMDU0MzU5LCJwb3N0X2lkjozNTE5MzYsIl8iOiI5MVZPWCIslmIhdCI6MTU4NjEyMDE4MywiZXhwljoxNTg2MTIzNzg2LCJpc3MiOiJwdWltMjE3NjUiLCJzdWIiOiJwb3N0LXJlYWN0aW9uIn0.6XrYDbJ8dMxm6oEddKeQNOQmY26HjjOmoPYkMFwrFbw>

morally acceptable, support for same-sex marriage, sexual relations and conception outside of marriage, acceptance of divorce and human embryo medical research, and polygamy and cloning humans. These are all issues that contradict a myriad of religious teachings. Therefore, secularization is more likely to impact democracy by having an even higher percentage of the population that is willing to support more liberal social issues rather than shifting to authoritarianism. Regardless, scholar Adrian Vermeule is directly criticized by French for the authoritarianism he embraces.

Adrian Vermeule recognized that such hostility to the church was encoded within liberalism from its birth, and his views align with those of Patrick Deneen. In *A Christian Strategy*, Vermeule challenges Tocqueville's theory on American religion and liberal-democratic values. Contrary to French, Vermeule believes that the inherent history of church and state has led liberalism to contribute to latent hostility toward traditional Christianity because of its origins in the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions. He does this in a way that Tocqueville did not directly predict, and as a result, he suggests avoiding the concept of liberalism altogether. Instead, he believes the solution to avoid secularization's negative impacts on American democracy is "an equally radical form of strategic flexibility on the part of the church, which must stand detached from all subsidiary political commitments, willing to enter into flexible alliances of convenience with any of the parties, institutions, and groups that jostle under the canopy of the liberal imperium."⁴⁵

⁴⁵ Vermeule, Adrian. "A Christian Strategy: Adrian Vermeule." First Things, November 1, 2017. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/11/a-christian-strategy>.

Further, Vermeule stated, “Liberalism undermines itself by transforming tolerance into increasingly radical intolerance of the “intolerant”—meaning those who hold illiberal views.” This intolerance has led to the claims of hostility to the religious freedom of religious traditionalists to practice and publicly proclaim their religious and moral perspectives. Although they are not validated, this results from secularists and citizens with illiberal views not being satisfied with American democracy. Ultimately, it also provides an opportunity for “the rise of nones” to continue if people feel as though there is no appropriate level of church-state separation within today’s American democracy.

Moreover, Vermeule defends his previous claim stating that liberalism is inherently unstable and is structurally disposed to generate the very forces that destroy it. He recognizes that it is not as acceptable in today's society as it once was to practice faith without receiving hostility. He furthered to say, "A different view, and my own, is that liberal intolerance represents not the self-undermining of liberalism, but a fulfillment of its essential nature. When a chrysalis shelters an insect that later bursts forth from it and leaves it shattered, the chrysalis has in fact fulfilled its true and predetermined end." Arguments such that American liberalism is at a point of true and predetermined end. It has generated the need for a new approach through a modernized political doctrine that does not threaten America's political system. As a result of illiberalism, Vermeule argues that the church should critically distance itself from the liberal state and adopt a flexible, "strategic"⁴⁶ approach.

⁴⁶ Vermeule, Adrian. “A Christian Strategy: Adrian Vermeule.” First Things, November 1, 2017. <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2017/11/a-christian-strategy>.

Academic Wilfred McClay contributes to potential strategies. In *Religion and Secularism: The American Experience*, McClay offers an approach to secularism, and American politics that he believes is universally applicable. He starts by addressing the broadness of the word “secularism.” However, in the political sense, he states that secularism regards politics as “an autonomous sphere, one that’s not subject to ecclesiastical governance, to the governance of a church or religion, or the church’s expression of that religion.”⁴⁷ By taking the approach of adopting a secular political order, he believes that religious practice or exercise can flourish because a secular political order is equally respectful of religionists and non-religionists alike. It grants “the freedom of the uncoerced individual, that fundamental Protestant principle, but it also has a more liberal, more capacious understanding of the religious needs of humanity, and therefore doesn’t presume that the religious impulse is merely an individual matter; or as one Supreme Court decision put it, something that we tell ourselves about the mystery of human life.”⁴⁸

Tocqueville recognized how new ideas emphasized secularity, and he was successful in acknowledging an American version of secularism. Although McClay compliments Tocqueville’s theory on American religion and liberal-democratic values, he challenges them, as well. He also challenges the ways our Founding Fathers, including Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, endorsed the crucial importance of religion for the sustenance of public morality. Because they thought religion was

⁴⁷ Rosentiel, Tom. “Religion and Secularism: The American Experience.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, December 21, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/2007/12/03/religion-and-secularism-the-american-experience/>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

beneficial, they made a powerful endorsement of the need for religion to be a force in public life, as a part of public discourse affecting the public sphere.⁴⁹

McClay addresses the founding documents and the intention behind the separation of powers. However, he acknowledges that no one at the time of the American founding expected the nation to evolve with constant tensions in which various cultural forms and religions coexist. In his words, "The Constitution was based on the assumptions that in any dynamic society there would be contending interest groups, and [that] one could best counteract their influence by systematically playing them off against one another." With that, he embraces countervailing forces holding one another in check.⁵⁰

Regarding the rapid cultural and legal shifts, McClay analyzes the history of American religion to conclude that religious tolerance has been necessary since the beginning of America's founding because no one group ever entirely dominates for a long period of time. The habits of tolerance that American history has been proven to produce is now competing with the impacts of secularization on American politics. The combination of religion and liberty that Tocqueville credited as two forces that worked together in America are now creating tension and clashing.

Concluding McClay's approach to secularization's impact on American democracy, the ability to recognize the flexibility within the word secularism is vital.

⁴⁹ Rosentiel, Tom. "Religion and Secularism: The American Experience." Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, December 21, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/2007/12/03/religion-and-secularism-the-american-experience/>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Tocqueville recognized a distinctly American version of secularism, and approaching secularism with a philosophical view or positive view could positively impact American democracy instead of viewing it in a negative light of hostility. McClay argues that a secular political system should be accepted as “an ultimate and alternative faith that rightly supersedes the tragic blindnesses” in the public realm. The negative approach to secularism has led to numerous controversial Supreme Court decisions because different aspects of the First Amendment have evolved throughout American history.

Moreover, the perspectives of Tocqueville were accurate and align with today's studies to an extent. In fact, Tocqueville recognized the ways in which religion succeeded in American democracy and the ways religious institutions supported American democratic institutions. He believed that “religion in America takes no direct part in the government of society but it must be regarded as the first of their political institutions for if it does not impart a taste for freedom it facilitates the use of it.” He is able to relate the beliefs of many political scientists in the belief that liberty cannot govern without faith.⁵¹

Conclusion: In Tocqueville's time in America, he observed the citizens' compliance with Christianity out of genuine belief or fear of being suspected of unbelief. Most of the American citizens centuries ago, as Tocqueville acknowledged, held some sort of religious faith. However, in today's time, that fear of being suspected of unbelief has diminished. Not all American citizens view religion as indispensable to the

⁵¹ Alexis de Tocqueville & Henry Reeve. “Chapter XVII - Principal Causes Maintaining the Democratic Republic—Part II.” “Democracy in America.” iBooks. Pg. 792, Vol. 1.
<https://books.apple.com/us/book/democracy-in-america/id376782206>

maintenance of republican institutions the way the founding fathers and recent scholars like David French do. With evolution, religious freedom, and the increase of secularization, there are citizens that do not hold the same religious values or even have reverence for religious aspects of American culture.

Because of the great political consequences resulting from the religious aspect of the United States that Tocqueville observed, his observations were accurate considering those times. However, he was wrong in denying the theories presented by the figures of the Enlightenment that predicted that as knowledge, science, rationality expands, religion weakens. American society has evolved, gained greater access through knowledge physically, institutionally, and digitally, along with rationality. These factors combined with political liberalism and religious liberty have weakened religious aspects of American politics.

Considering trends favoring secularism within the American religious landscape, Tocqueville and some of the founders were also wrong in their assessment that humans are naturally religious. Currently, we are in a time where liberalism is being impacted by secularization, and the statistics expect trends favoring secularism to increase. Ironically, it reflects a time Tocqueville recalls when the unbelievers in Europe attacked Christians as their political opponents rather than as their religious adversaries. Adrian Vermeule was accurate in crediting the Enlightenment and the Age of Revolutions for these such inherent, latent hostility toward traditional Christianity which substantiates his recommended need for American politics to distance itself from the liberal state and adopt a flexible, "strategic" approach. In a democracy, politics is constantly shifting and

changing. Attitudes and decisions are contingent upon the majority of American voters in the democratizing age and religious beliefs and values are shifting.

The bottom line is that centuries have passed, and the religious and political landscapes have been impacted due to evolution. A need for reconstruction within American politics regarding religion and secularism is needed. As suggested by Wilfred McClay, a secular political system allows the church and the state to flourish separately. The founding generation deserves credit for their beneficial advocacy for non-establishment. Based on the consensus views amongst the founding generation, without liberty, religion will not thrive in America. American journalist, Frederick Clarkson, suggests that “religious freedom is the cornerstone of democracy and arguably the glue that holds us together”⁵² because “whatever our differences, we are unified in having the freedom to differ.”⁵³ He believes that Americans are obligated never to lose sight of democracy, and that it must be carried forward through the 21st century. In order for that to happen, religious freedom, especially regarding the choice of secularism, must be accepted the same way it was in the beginning of the republic as Tocqueville saw it.

Considering Tocqueville’s observations during the founding of the republic, if a new political philosophy is established, Tocqueville’s observations could continue to be proven correct. Nevertheless, the current political system fulfills the founders’ intentions, although secularism’s impact on religious influence and the religious landscape does

⁵² “Religious Freedom Is the Cornerstone of Our Democracy.” Political Research Associates.
<https://www.politicalresearch.org/2018/02/28/religious-freedom-is-the-cornerstone-of-our-democracy>.

⁵³ Ibid.

not reflect their original vision. Regardless, because of religious liberty and non-establishment, today's political system allows for both the religious and nonreligious American populations to live their "faiths" or lack of faith, and the founding documents support such freedoms.

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Chapter Two: American Politics in a Secular Democracy

Tatianna Carpenter

Johns Hopkins University

Introduction: Politics change over the years as different social issues become more prevalent and different groups advocate for those public policy issues. Religious views could be a catalyst for some of the political shifts America faces in generations to come. Political scientists, legal scholars, and historians have studied the history of religion in America and American politics and believe in the need for reconstruction. Nevertheless, the reconstruction may be inevitable.

Recent research shows that millennials are less religious than older Americans, and in the late 19th century, 95% of Americans attended church or some religious service on a weekly basis. Regardless, America still leads with the number of religious services held weekly, and services can even be accessed online in today's digital society. Despite the innovation in the church, recent surveys find that most generational cohorts are becoming less religiously affiliated as they age. Statistics suggest that 35% of adult millennials who are Americans born between 1981 and 1996 are religiously unaffiliated. As a result, the term religious "nones" was developed in reference to the citizens practicing atheism or agnosticism, or whose religion is "nothing in particular."⁵⁴ However, religious "nones" are more likely to identify as atheist over the years, and studies show that the percentage of "nones" who do not believe in God increased by 50 percent over the course of seven years.⁵⁵ Research shows that Christianity still

⁵⁴ Lipka, Michael. "Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones'." Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/05/12/millennials-increasingly-are-driving-growth-of-nones/>

⁵⁵ Johnson, Rev. Ben. (2020). How socialism causes atheism. Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://www.acton.org/religion-liberty/volume-29-number-3/how-socialism-causes-atheism>

dominates the majority of the American population, however, as religious affiliation declines, arguments regarding American politics and religion have increased.

Take a moment to observe religious trends of the past by dissecting the history of religion in American politics. The Pledge of Allegiance was written in August 1892, and religion was not found in its original form which read, "I pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands, one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."⁵⁶ Approximately thirty years later, the words, "the Flag of the United States of America" were added. Then, sixty years later, it was President Eisenhower who encouraged Congress to add the words "under God," which Americans recognize today as, "I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."⁵⁷ Furthermore, the words "God bless America" have been uttered by every United States president in pursuit of protecting our country and keeping religion alive in American politics.

The truth of the matter is that religion is embedded in American politics, and it has mattered even before the founding of the Republic.⁵⁸ However, regardless of God's influence over our nation, the No Religious Test Clause under Article VI, Section 3 of the Constitution makes it illegal and a violation of the Constitution to impose any religious test on government officials. Not only would religious affiliation discrimination

⁵⁶ The Pledge of Allegiance. (n.d.). Retrieved October 26, 2020, from <https://www.ushistory.org/documents/pledge.htm>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Green, J. C. (2010). *The faith factor: How religion influences American elections*. Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books.

defy the No Religious Test Act, but limiting religious affiliation to just one specific religion would not support equality in America, and it would be a violation of the First Amendment. In addition, the Declaration of Independence cites the creator as the bestower of unalienable rights, yet, the Constitution also guarantees freedom of religion.

Despite the founding documents explicitly stating that religious discrimination is unconstitutional, being atheist in politics is not commonly accepted... yet. Nevertheless, research predicts that atheism will continue to become more accepted in America, and therefore, in American politics. As the decline in religious affiliation amongst American citizens continues to increase, more non-religious/atheist candidates will emerge as well. As political scientists and scholars expect there to be an increase in non-religious affiliation, that generation will eventually become the leaders of America. Our political leaders are a reflection of American society, and representation matters. Acceptance in religion has been embedded in American politics before the founding of the Republic. The religiously unaffiliated are common targets of intolerance rather than acceptance.

For decades, religion in America has been contemplated, but now, the idea of no religion at all is the new political taboo for some Americans, but not all. This paper will observe religious trends of the past, present and the potential trends in the future of America. Critics argue that religion is a major factor in civil society. This political theory paper will suggest why it is important that these trends favoring secularism are happening, and what this could mean for American politics in a secularly dominated democracy.

Literature Review: In the Pew Research study, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, the population, religious landscape, and religious affiliation and how it has decreased over more than a decade was analyzed. The percentages suggested that religious disaffiliation is a growing trend in America, and the religiously unaffiliated American percentage of the population consisted of people who described their religious identity as atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”. Another Pew Research study, *Faith on the Hill: The religious composition of the 116th Congress*, focused on Congress opposed to the population and religious landscape. The study showed that from the 115th Congress to the 116th Congress, there has been a 3-percentage-point decline in the share of members of Congress who identify as Christian. As of January 2019, only 0.2% of Congress identified as unaffiliated with any religious organization, and 8 members either didn’t know or refused to identify, making up 3.4% of Congress. Political scientists noticed a growing number in Congress members who chose to decline from stating their religious affiliation, or lack thereof, which could be due to their fear of the potential hindrance to the candidate’s electoral success. Nevertheless, it was stated that by far the largest difference between the U.S. public and Congress is in the share of citizens who are unaffiliated with a religious group. In the general public, 23% said they are atheist, agnostic or “nothing in particular”.⁵⁹

Furthermore, a tolerant and accepting America has been predicted, and surveys substantiate this possibility. Members of the American Humanist Association’s (AHA)

⁵⁹ Faith on the Hill: The religious composition of the 116th Congress. (2020, May 30). Retrieved October 16, 2020, from <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/01/03/faith-on-the-hill-116/>

Center of Freethought Equality believe that we are “good without God”.⁶⁰ The AHA advocates progressive values and equality for humanists, atheists, and freethinkers. They have claimed that atheism is no longer a political taboo, and a survey poll was executed to support their beliefs that being nonreligious, agnostic, or atheist need not be considered an impediment to a candidate’s electoral success. In sum, a large majority of voters are willing to vote for candidates despite a lack of religious affiliation. Suggesting that atheism is no longer a political taboo, the results show that being nonreligious, agnostic, or atheist does not hinder a candidate’s chances of winning.

The study was initially inspired by Lake Research Partners for the AHA in the 2018 midterm election when a candidate in a very red district said he “couldn’t possibly identify as an atheist because he couldn’t afford to lose any more voters.”⁶¹ Because he automatically lost voters by identifying as a Democrat, more since he is pro-choice, and even more with his support of LGBTQ equality, Lake Research Partners considered the following question: Would the supporters of a pro-choice, LGBTQ equality Democrat care if their candidate was also an atheist? At the conclusion of their research they stated, “Nontheistic, progressive Democrats in non-swing districts should no longer feel hesitant to be public about their religious identity. And while it still could be a challenging factor in swing districts, it’s no longer the taboo it once was.” This left room to analyze how unimportant religion can become when policy stances are being considered.

⁶⁰ Staff, TheHumanist.com, Political Taboo Poll 2020 “The American Humanist Association.” American Humanist Association, September 29, 2020. <https://americanhumanist.org/>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

Similarly, the secularly dominated group, American Atheists, launched a survey about U.S. secularism. Other secular organizations including Atheist Alliance of America, Camp Quest, Center for Inquiry, Foundation Beyond Belief, The Freethought Society, Hispanic American Freethinkers, Recovering from Religion, Secular Coalition for America, Secular Student Alliance, and Society for Humanistic Judaism all collaborated with this organization to claim their place in America. They felt that large polling organizations do not offer enough data about the experiences of non-religious Americans, including atheists and agnostics, and based on my research, it is easy to agree. To benefit the entire secular community, they conducted a survey with the goal of making the voices of the secular community heard and help determine the future of the secular movement. Nick Fish, American Atheists' president, wanted to give them a chance to represent their community as opposed to just being talked about and studied by religious communities.

In *Survey Experiments on Candidate Religiosity, Political Attitudes, and Vote Choice* by Jeremiah Castle, David Campbell, Geoffrey Layman, and John Green, it was suggested that individuals develop a sense of personal identity from being part of a group and comparing themselves to allies and rivals. Due to the increase of the religiously unaffiliated, the last decades of the 20th century witnessed a “restructuring” of American religion and its relationship to the two major political parties. The authors collectively agreed that while religious tradition (what religion people are) is still relevant,

religiosity (how religious people are) is becoming the new focus when considering issues such as abortion, gay marriage, and prayer in public schools.⁶²

Furthermore, as religious groups and identities become structured less by what religion they are and more by how religious they are (or are not), candidate religiosity and secularism should condition the impact of political orientations such as partisanship and cultural policy attitudes on vote choice. The authors also claimed that highly religious candidates should attract more support from Republicans and cultural conservatives, while overtly secular candidates should appeal more to Democrats and cultural liberals. To come to these conclusions, a survey experiment was executed where respondents were required to evaluate a state legislative candidate with varying levels of religiosity and secularism.

Supporting the beliefs in *Survey Experiments on Candidate Religiosity, Political Attitudes, and Vote Choice* by Jeremiah Castle, David Campbell, Geoffrey Layman, and John Green which suggested that individuals develop a sense of personal identity from being part of a group and comparing themselves to allies and rivals, English writer and philosopher, Aldous Huxley, has stated in the past that atheists may be more inclined to accept comprehensive socioeconomic ideologies as a substitute for faith and “to satisfy their hunger for meaning.”⁶³ As a result of feeling invisible and/or discriminated against, it is likely that the secular community will come together and focus on policy issues that

⁶² Castle, Jeremiah J, David E Campbell, Geoffrey C Layman, and John C Green. 2017. “Survey Experiments on Candidate Religiosity, Political Attitudes, and Vote Choice.” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 56 (1): 143–61.
<http://search.ebscohost.com.proxy1.library.jhu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=rh&AN=ATLAI8W170930003595&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁶³ Johnson, Rev. Ben. (2020). How socialism causes atheism. Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://www.acton.org/religion-liberty/volume-29-number-3/how-socialism-causes-atheism>

may go against religion, but align with their beliefs which could become frontline issues in democracy as religious affiliation declines. These findings prove that *The Future of Religion in American Politics* edited by Charles W. Dunn has a valid idea that partisanship can be related to social groups.

The Future of Religion in American Politics edited by Charles W. Dunn addressed numerous public policy issues, questioning if God may be tearing society apart. A wide variety of public policy issues go against religion and are catalysts for controversial arguments about how the issues protested for politically can be viewed as sinful in terms of religion. Public policy issues that clash with religion also clash with the rights declared in our founding documents: the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. This could provoke more willingness of our nation to choose freedom at the cost of religion. Historical issues that still exist today such as divorce, women's rights, abortion and even slavery's lasting racial impacts, are challenged by many religions and denominations. Because of culture, democracy could continue to thrive despite the increase of nonbelievers.

Having the choice of joining a variety of religious communities gives people the option of not joining at all which alters the role of religion in politics and strengthens aspects of culture since partisanship can be related to social groups. It is important to understand voters' own religions affect their voting decisions and how they respond to a candidate's religious affiliation.⁶⁴ In *The Party Faithful: Partisan Images, Candidate*

⁶⁴ Campbell, David E, Green, John C., Layman, Geoffrey C. 2011. "The Party Faithful: Partisan Images, Candidate Religion, and the Electoral Impact of Party Identification" *American Journal of Political Science*, 55: 42-58. doi:10.1111/j.1540-5907.2010.00474.x.

Religion, and the Electoral Impact of Party Identification, David E. Campbell, John C. Green, and Geoffrey C. Layman explored the relationship between religion and partisanship. Through their studies, they theorized that voters support candidates with whom they share a religious orientation and whether or not the voters' views typically align with the party's beliefs. They concluded that party identification depends on issues, ideology and/or group identity and images.

Emphasizing the importance of these trends in religion, *Religion and Democracy in the United States: Danger or Opportunity?* edited by Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson weighs the pros and cons of democracy in America. Democracy was defined as “a system of procedures by which majorities tend to have their way, and the majority rules.”⁶⁵ However, democracy is also defined as a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodically held free elections.⁶⁶ Similar to the studies on personal identity development relying on being part of a group and comparing themselves to allies and rivals in *Survey Experiments on Candidate Religiosity, Political Attitudes, and Vote Choice* by Jeremiah Castle, David Campbell, Geoffrey Layman, and John Green, this book from Wolfe and Katznelson referenced the importance of “othering” in society. Because members of a group define their own identity by emphasizing what distinguishes them from another group, othering is intended to strengthen one group by weakening another. Groups including atheists,

⁶⁵ Wolfe, A. (2010). *Religion and democracy in the United States: Danger or opportunity?* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

⁶⁶ Democracy. (n.d.). Retrieved December 6, 2020, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/democracy>

homosexuals, militarists, racists and Communists are common targets of intolerance rather than acceptance. However, religiosity supports political intolerance allowing the opportunity for a more tolerant America.

Moving further, since the 2016 election, there has been a major increase in secular elected government officials from 5 elected officials to 50. The article *Secular Elected Officials* provided by the Center for Freethought Equality stated that because these elected officials govern and advance public policy without theism or other supernatural beliefs, the nontheist elected officials have been classified as “the NAAHS - ‘Nones,’ Atheists, Agnostics, Humanists, Secularists.”⁶⁷ Secular politicians tend to openly advocate for the secular community, and the issues most of them tend to focus on are the separation of government and religion, scientific integrity, reproductive freedom, LGBTQ rights, and civil rights for all Americans. This study supports the increase in favor of secular politics as a result of the clash between religion and relevant controversial policy issues in modern democracy.

In order to fully comprehend the impact this has on the future of American politics and religious affiliation, we must observe the trends in American society that are producing these shifts in religious beliefs. In a previous literature review I’ve done on the Religious Shifts and the New Millennial Influence in American Politics, I discovered influences that produce these shifts in religious beliefs. In *Imagining No Heaven: The Rise of the Nones and the Decline of Religion*, the sociologist of religion Kevin McCaffree, Michael Shremer, and psychologist Frank J. Sulloway analyzed data from a

⁶⁷ “Secular Elected Officials.” Accessed October 2, 2020. <http://www.cfequality.org/secular-elected-officials>

morality test on 12,000 participants. The three types of “nones” they discovered are Non Believers-Nonspiritual Nones (which would be the atheists and agnostics), Spiritual-but-not-Religious Nones who believe in a higher power, and Unchurched-Believer Nones who believe in a traditional God but do not attend church. Upon their research, it was discovered that personal, moral and political variation exists among “nones”. Contrary to popular belief, “nones” have more education than the religiously affiliated, they are more likely to be unmarried, have children later, less likely to see morality as God-given, and are more socially liberal in supporting euthanasia, birth control access, freedom of speech and religion, and marijuana legalization.⁶⁸

Beyond the social influences, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* by Robert D. Putnam, David E. Campbell proves that innovations in religion are nothing new. They explained that America is the birthplace of a variety of different faiths, although some have been more popular than others. In fact, one of the major themes throughout many of the book’s chapters is change. However, the striking difference in the religious trend of “nones” is the lack of religion altogether. The authors confirmed that religious “nones” are increasing because of religion’s political overtones. They considered these religious shifts as “slow, steady and imperceptible”⁶⁹ changes that can be passed on through generations. The book suggested that both generational and life cycles produce greater religiosity as an individual ages.

⁶⁸ Shermer, Michael. 2018. “Imagining No Heaven: The Rise of the Nones and the Decline of Religion.” *Skeptic* 23 (2): 32–37.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=asn&AN=130189339&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁶⁹ Putnam, R. D., Campbell, D. E., & Garrett, S. R. (2012). *American grace: How religion divides and unites us*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Author Christel Manning examined similar trends of generational influences in the book *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents Are Raising Their Children*.

Theoretically, it proved how religious “nones” can be generational through a series of interviews executed by Manning. He observed religiously unaffiliated parents in the United States and studied their secular worldviews and the ways they raised their children. As a result, most of the parents believed in giving their children the right to choose their religion or spirituality.⁷⁰ Being as though these trends favoring secularism are generational, this theory contributes to the expectations of a secular American democracy.

Bringing Up Nones: Intergenerational Influences and Cohort Trends is a scientific study of religion conducted by Vern L. Bengtsonr, David Haywards, Phil Zuckerman and Merril Silverstein. By acknowledging the rise of unaffiliated millennials, the study provides explanations for why these trends are happening. A few of the reasons provided were older ages at marriage, higher education rates, reaction against the priest/pedophile scandal, and political backlash against the religious right, as well as the traditional explanation of youthful rebellion against religious parents. The authors examined parents’ and grandparents’ influence on youth over several decades to see if this trend was nurtured. Qualitative data was used to examine multigenerational socialization of humanism, of atheism, and of the unintended socialization of “religious rebels” from highly religious parents. The result in each case was that the millennial of the family became atheist or non-affiliated.

⁷⁰ Manning, Christel. *Losing Our Religion: How Unaffiliated Parents Are Raising Their Children*. United Kingdom: NYU Press, 2015.

A collection of studies have observed how religion is more likely to be passed down through generations as a result of kitchen table talks, and another collection of studies focus on the influence of religion in America. *The Faith Factor: How Religion Influences American Elections* by John Clifford Green acknowledges the impact religion has in American politics while understanding that the direction of the future of religion and politics are impossible to predict with complete accuracy. However, a few scenarios predicted by Green based on the 2002, 2004 and 2006 congressional elections have already proven to be true. One scenario that aligns with consistent beliefs is that more religious voters would strongly support Republicans while less observant voters would even more strongly support Democrats. Green also predicted, “If such a trend persisted for long enough, religious traditions would cease to matter in politics.” Social issues would create culture wars, and “moral value” priorities would increase which would cause changes in American religion. Eventually, this would provoke a “restructuring”⁷¹ of religion. Despite the changes, he acknowledged room for different kinds of religious behavior and beliefs to coexist and generate different types of traditionalism or secularity.⁷²

Throughout the literature and surveys provided, there are several common elements that could be explored to predict a continuous increase of secularization in America. Many scholars have different theories, but ultimately, their ideas support one another. Policy stances, traditionalism/secularity, and culture are common elements found throughout the literature. The collaborative efforts of many authors have created a

⁷¹ Green, J. C. (2010). *The faith factor: How religion influences American elections*. Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books.

⁷² Ibid.

wide variety of reasons why trends favoring secularism are happening, and how American politics are envisioned in a secular democracy.

Data/Methodology: In order to gain a better understanding of today's religious trends, studies were executed on the religious trends favoring secularism, how the shifts will impact American politics in the future and the secular community. Using databases, books and internet sources, this collection of information was gathered through numerous scholarly articles, public opinion surveys and previous studies on this topic. The surveys came from the American Atheist Organization, the American Humanist Association's (AHA) Center of Freethought Equality, and Pew Research Organization, while others were general surveys used to analyze the levels of support for nonreligious/atheist candidates and contribute to the literature.

The American Atheists survey *Reality Check* on nonreligious/atheist Americans had a goal of surveying 10,000 non-religious Americans, but they surveyed more than 34,000 non-religious Americans classifying this U.S. Secular Survey as the largest survey of the secular community ever conducted.⁷³ Considering the fact that the secular community makes up a large part of the growing population, American Atheists felt that demographic information about religion has been overlooked by federal surveys in regard to non-religious Americans, so they decided to conduct their own survey. About 57 percent of the participants identified as atheist. Almost 55 percent of the participants came from Protestant Christian religious backgrounds, and almost 30 percent came from Catholic religious backgrounds making Christianity the largest group of religious

⁷³ American Atheists Launches Largest Survey on Non-Religious Americans and their Struggles. (2019, October 15). Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://www.atheists.org/2019/10/us-secular-survey/>

upbringings. 14 percent of the participants came from diverse religious backgrounds, and the same percentage of participants came from highly religious backgrounds.

Their dataset reflected the religious views from citizens across regions and communities within the United States. According to Gill, this survey was intended to address specific challenges atheists face in their daily lives, to advocate for atheist civil rights, to establish programs to meet community needs, and to seek grant funding to benefit our population.⁷⁴ Based on the survey report, concealment was measured by asking how often the participants avoid talking about topics related to or otherwise indicating their secular or nonreligious identity in their interactions with their immediate family, extended family, friends, people at work, people at school, and strangers. Their answers were calculated on a 5-point scale which calculated the mean of the constituent groups.⁷⁵

The AHA survey allowed the researchers to believe that the political bias against voting for a nonreligious candidate has weakened and will continue to do so. For their research, they spoke with candidates running in the 2018 midterm election about the risk of identifying as an atheist candidate. This led them to question American citizens that support the policy issues that go against religion. Would the supporters of a pro-choice, LGBTQ equality Democrat care if their candidate was also an atheist? As a

⁷⁴ American Atheists Launches Largest Survey on Non-Religious Americans and their Struggles. (2019, October 15). Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://www.atheists.org/2019/10/us-secular-survey/>

⁷⁵ American Atheists Launches Largest Survey on Non-Religious Americans and their Struggles. (2019, October 15). Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://www.atheists.org/2019/10/us-secular-survey/>

result, they expanded their research to the public, but the reliability of their dataset also relied on atheist candidates and their campaign results.

The Pew Research, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, survey report on religious affiliation was based on a collection of data over five years, including the Pew Research Center's 2007 and 2014 Religious Landscape Studies which was the most extensive and had national random-digit-dial surveys with 5,000 respondents. The random digit dial consists of both landline and cellphone numbers in all 50 U.S. states and the District of Columbia. In effort of balancing cost and fieldwork and improving the overall demographics of the interview such as age, race, ethnicity and education, approximately 25 percent of the interviews were conducted by landline and 75 percent were by cellphone. The structure of the landline sample included both listed and unlisted numbers for the sake of equal representation. The cellphone sample uses systematic sampling from wireless banks of 100 contiguous numbers and shared service banks with no directory-listed landline numbers.⁷⁶ In sum, the collection of data included 88 surveys from the decade of 2009 to 2019 and interviews with 168,890 Americans. Each respondent was asked dozens of detailed questions about their religious identities, beliefs, attendance and practices.⁷⁷ This study observes the shifts in religious affiliation and emphasizes the growth of the secular population on a yearly basis at a rapid pace.

⁷⁶ Our survey methodology in detail. (n.d.). Retrieved December 6, 2020, from <https://www.pewresearch.org/methods/u-s-survey-research/our-survey-methodology-in-detail/>

⁷⁷ In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace. (2020, June 09). Retrieved November 14, 2020, from <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

Throughout the research in this exploratory study, the idea that American politics will eventually govern and be governed by a secularly dominated society is contributed. Connecting the different literature, the history of American politics, and analyzing different surveys develops correlations between the sources to substantiate these claims and support this prediction. Furthermore, this research explores a cause-and-effect relationship between religion and politics in America. By gathering extensive evidence from a variety of sources and coalescing the evidence together establishes consistency and agreement. It is important to consider the fact that in order to accurately determine faith in the new millennium, the millennial generation will have to be representatives in American politics. With that being said, the future cannot be predicted with complete accuracy, but these trends, undoubtedly, make it easy to predict a future of American politics in a secularly dominated democracy.

Presentation of Results: According to American Atheists' Vice President for Legal and Policy, Alison Gill, there were more than 75 million non-religious Americans as of 2019 that openly addressed their lack of religious affiliation. This statistic of non-religious Americans outnumbers evangelicals. Approximately 34,000 nonreligious American citizens completed the survey including atheists, agnostics, humanists, skeptics, freethinkers, and people who identified as secular or nonreligious. The results of the survey determined that participants living in very religious communities experienced nearly 40% more stigma than those in not at all religious communities, and religion affected their experiences in education, public service, and employment. Consequently, about 31 percent of participants felt the need to conceal their nonreligious identity from members of their immediate family, about 44 percent felt the

need to conceal their nonreligious identity among people at work, and almost 43 percent felt the need to conceal their nonreligious identity in school. With that being said, it is important to acknowledge and understand that these on-going shifts in religious affiliation (or disaffiliation) could determine which policy issues are deemed most important in American politics.

As previously mentioned, in *Religion and Democracy in the United States: Danger or Opportunity?* edited by Alan Wolfe and Ira Katznelson, it was agreed that groups including atheists, homosexuals, militarists, racists and Communists are common targets of intolerance rather than acceptance. Their theories support these survey results, in fact, one female respondent from California stated, “The current administration is promoting religion rather than respecting separation of church and state, so I worry that my freedom from religion is being threatened and that I may be persecuted in the years to come if they are successful in pushing a non-secular agenda.”⁷⁸

Policy advocacy is at the forefront of the beliefs of the population of unaffiliated Americans. The unaffiliated percentage of the population tend to be more socially liberal on many issues that often contradict religion than most church going Christians, and they are more willing to support specific policies despite the contradictions. Ranging from highest to lowest priority levels, the policies that are prioritized within the

⁷⁸ Wolfe, A. (2010). *Religion and democracy in the United States: Danger or opportunity?* New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

unaffiliated community are maintaining secular public schools, opposing religious exemptions that allow for discrimination, inappropriate religious activity by churches, addressing climate change, protecting youth from religious-based harm, supporting and protecting the LGBTQ community, preventing public school funding of religious schools, denial of health care based on religion, comprehensive and medically accurate sexual education, persecution of nonreligious people internationally, and opposing religious displays on public property.⁷⁹ This support within progressive communities has contributed to certain legal and political gains that go against religion. However, religious beliefs have still impacted certain freedom in terms of healthcare. Under the Trump Administration, it was ruled that healthcare organizations can opt out of providing health care services like abortions or sex reassignment surgery if they object on religious or moral grounds.⁸⁰

Contributing to this research, secularity is expected to be reflected within the advocacy priorities of the United States political system. Secular politicians would advocate for the secular community and demand that such policies be prioritized.⁸¹ With such high participation in the American Atheist survey, it is easy to conclude that these are the types of advocacy priorities that would be the center of a secularly dominated democracy due to such neglect.

⁷⁹ American Atheists Launches Largest Survey on Non-Religious Americans and their Struggles. (2019, October 15). <https://www.atheists.org/2019/10/us-secular-survey/>

⁸⁰ Akpan, Nsikan, Gretchen Frazee, and Courtney Norris. "What the New Religious Exemptions Law Means for Your Health Care." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, May 3, 2019. <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/what-the-new-religious-exemptions-law-means-for-your-health-care>.

⁸¹ "Secular Elected Officials." Accessed October 2, 2020. <http://www.cfequality.org/secular-elected-officials>

Moving forward, the American Humanist Association's (AHA) Center of Freethought Equality surveyed Democratic voters who support policy issues such as LGBTQ rights, abortion, and pro-marriage-equality. They found that 74 percent of Americans believe that a candidate being non-religious or agnostic would make no difference in their vote, and 72 percent believe that a candidate being atheist would make no difference in their vote.⁸² 60 percent of respondents preferred a candidate who stood for most of the things they believed in but who didn't believe in God or who was nonreligious opposed to a candidate who was religious but didn't stand for most of the things they did. According to the poll results, 79 percent of Democrats, 68 percent of Republicans and 69 percent of Independents would vote for a nonbeliever or nonreligious candidate who shares voters' views on the issues. Further, 14 percent of the participants said that they would be more likely to vote for a nonreligious or agnostic candidate, and 10 percent said that they would be more likely to vote for an atheist candidate.

Beyond the public, atheist candidates were a major focus of this dataset. Democratic Congressman Jared Huffman (CA-2) became the only public nontheist member in Congress in November of 2017. However, it was concluded that being agnostic was not a factor in his re-election. The percentage of his vote in the 2018 midterm election was 76.4 percent. The difference in turnout was slightly less than his 2016 results which were 76.9 percent, yet more than his 2014 midterm results which

⁸² Staff, TheHumanist.com, Political Taboo Poll 2020 "The American Humanist Association." American Humanist Association, September 29, 2020. <https://americanhumanist.org/>.

were 75.0 percent.⁸³ Another example used to substantiate their dataset was the 2016 and 2018 underdog campaigns of Gayle Jordan, who ran for the Tennessee State Senate and was attacked for being atheist. In 2016, Jordan concealed her religious views and received 25.6 percent of the votes. In 2018, her votes increased totaling 28.3 percent of the votes when she openly expressed her religious disaffiliation.⁸⁴ Although she lost both campaigns, being an atheist did not have any effect on her race.

Overall, this survey assured that nonreligious, progressive Democrats, especially in non-swing districts, can openly express their religious disaffiliation without risking support from voters. Contributing to my research, these poll results support the idea that atheism or having no religious affiliation should not be considered an impediment to a candidate's electoral success.⁸⁵ With the support of traditionalists and conservatives, secularity will become more accepted and prevalent amongst voter preferences. The importance of religious affiliation weakens when policy stances are included in the question.

The Pew Research study, *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, expresses rates and percentages that reflect just how rapidly these trends are happening. It was discovered that 65 percent of American adults described themselves as Christians, 43 percent identified with Protestantism, 20 percent identified as Catholic, and 26 percent had no religious affiliation. Over the past decade, there was a 12 percent decrease in Christians while there was a 17 percent increase in the non-

⁸³ Staff, TheHumanist.com, Political Taboo Poll 2020 "The American Humanist Association." American Humanist Association, September 29, 2020. <https://americanhumanist.org/>.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

religious group. Although there was a 51 percent decrease in Protestantism, there has been a 23 percent decrease since 2009. These statistics contribute to my research by dissecting the trends in secularism and focusing on the demographics.

Their studies also concluded that these trends that are prevalent are broad-based. The demographics range from whites, blacks, Hispanics, men, women, younger adults, older adults, college graduates, people with lower levels of education attainment, Democrats, and Republicans in all regions of the country. However, religious disaffiliation was more prevalent amongst younger generations where only 49 percent of Millennials considered themselves Christians. 84 percent of the Silent Generation (those born between 1928 and 1945) described themselves as Christians, and 76 percent of Baby Boomers considered themselves Christians. Their studies claim that one-in-ten Millennials identify with non-Christian faiths, and today, religious “nones” make up one-third of Democrats.

A secularly dominated democracy is more likely to come together and focus on policy issues that align with their beliefs even if they go against religion, especially as religious affiliation declines. Nevertheless, because the increasing separation from God can be outsourced to the government, I believe that American politics and secularism will coexist despite religion’s dominance in the past.

Discussion/Conclusion: Based on the history of American politics and previous presidential leaders, most people would not expect that atheism/non-religious affiliation would be accepted in America. It is difficult to say with complete certainty how the secular trend in America will play out politically because only time will tell. However,

based on the findings, secularism can be accepted and coexist with American politics because of policy, representation, partisanship, and generational influences. A myriad of literature on this topic confirm the beliefs that atheism and/or non-religious affiliation could in fact coexist with American politics especially through othering. Shrinking other religious affiliations will allow room for policy stances to override religion. This on-going trend is important because it is the future of American society, and therefore, American democracy.

With American society shifting in the direction of a secularly dominated democracy, the percentages of secular candidates and people willing to support a nonreligious/atheist candidate will continue to increase. It also suggests that the Republican Party may become the “go-to” for America’s religious citizens while the Democratic Party may become the “go-to” for the nonreligious citizens. Nevertheless, research suggests that as the demographics continue to change, the bias against atheism and/or non-religious affiliation diminishes, even in terms of American politics.

Advocacy priority could potentially allow for more tolerance of the secular community since the importance of religious affiliation weakens when policy stances are included in the question. However, different policy issues will be deemed more important in American politics. Religiosity and secularism are expected to condition the impact of political orientations including partisanship and cultural policy attitudes. Partisanship and religious affiliation are often generational. The younger generation is already less religious and/or lacks religious affiliation, and those views are likely to be passed down.

The generations to come are the future of American politics, and they will decide faith in the new millennium. That generation will serve as the representatives and political leaders in America. This topic also allows for a further exploratory study on the foundations of the church-state separation. Previously studying the intentions of the founding fathers when crafting the founding documents and separating the church and the state contributes to the idea of a secularly dominated democracy. Overall, based on this research, religion is embedded in American politics, but the growing portion of non-religious Americans has demanded a need for reconstruction that will be inevitable. The founding documents support room for reconstruction, tolerance of the secular community, and policy advocacy is expected to change the trajectory of the American political system as trends favoring secularism increase.

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Chapter Three: Progressive Implementations in the Church-State Separation

Tatianna Carpenter

Johns Hopkins University

Introduction: Consensus views amongst America's founding fathers in favor of disestablishment led to the dismantling of all state establishments of religion. Eventually, further consensus views and the secularizing effects of disestablishment led to the embracement of complete church-state separation. Centuries later, the "wall of separation between church and state"⁸⁶ as Thomas Jefferson encouraged in 1802, remains a core principle of American political democracy for organizing relations between church and state.⁸⁷

Academia studying the separation of the church and the state has led to conflicting theories about the founders' intentions. The intersection of the church and the state, especially in today's society, has also led sociologists, political scientists, and Constitutional law experts to address a variety of different questions related to secularism and the church-state separation. However, even historians of the past debated the separation of the church and the state. Acceptance in religion has been embedded in American politics before the founding of the Republic. Common views amongst the founding fathers reflect their intentions for religious freedom to prevent the government from enforcing the doctrines of powerful religious factions and give people the right to be free and choose what to believe when religion is accepted as a personal preference. The founding fathers were directly involved in crafting the founding documents and addressing the church-state separation and religious liberty.

⁸⁶ Greenawalt, Kent. 2005. "History as Ideology: Philip Hamburger's Separation of Church and State." *California Law Review* 93 (1): 367–96.
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⁸⁷ Ibid.

Considering religious affiliation statistics of the past and the entanglement of the church and state, the pace at which religious affiliation in America is declining is concerning for some and relieves others. There are many definitions of the word secular. One distinct definition complements the separation of church and state; “Denoting attitudes, activities, or other things that have no religious or spiritual basis; not subject or bound by religious rule.”⁸⁸ Progressivism is also broadly defined throughout academia, but there are a few definitions that complement the argument of this critical analysis:

- Support for or advocacy of social reform.
- The political ideology that favors rational governmental action to improve society. It arose as a response to the vast changes brought about by modernization.⁸⁹
- A philosophy that asserts that advancements in science, technology, economic development, and social organization are vital to improve the human condition.⁹⁰

In the past, America's Protestants were inspired by a belief in scientific progress and otherworldly ideals. As a result, they began turning away from their churches during the last quarter of the 19th century, even as their churches turned away from traditional religious faith and embraced the era's reform causes.⁹¹ The Progressive Era was a prominent point in United States history relating to American politics. The national

⁸⁸ “Secularism in America: Secular Progressive Outreach: United States.” Secular Progressive. <https://www.spoutlink.org/>.

⁸⁹ Boundless. “Boundless US History.” Lumen. Accessed April 10, 2021. <https://courses.lumenlearning.com/boundless-ushistory/chapter/the-progressive-era/>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ “The Good News of Secularism.” 1993. *Wilson Quarterly* 17 (2): 140. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=f5h&AN=9610291248&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

political leaders of the Progressive Era included Theodore Roosevelt, Robert M. La Follette Sr., Charles Evans Hughes, and Herbert Hoover on the Republican side, and William Jennings Bryan, Woodrow Wilson, and Al Smith on the Democratic side. During the early 20th century, ranging from 1890 to 1920, the Progressives intended to make American society a more democratic place to live by advocating for and implementing various regulations.⁹² Essentially, the main focuses of the Progressive Era were purification of the government, modernization, a focus on family and education, prohibition, and women's suffrage. In today's generation of progressives in America, the goal is still the same, although other progressive issues have emerged.

Human society is improving and advancing over time. Advancements in science, technology, economic development, and social organization are inevitable influences of progressivism. The lasting impact of the political movement, progressivism, continues to embrace societal changes and the need for reform. However, due to the intersectional relationship between politics, policy, and religion, religion has become less critical for secularists concerning policy-making when pursuing a more democratic society. With that being said, policy stance tends to override the importance of religion in politics. Advocacy priority could potentially allow for a higher tolerance of the secular community since the importance of religious affiliation weakens when policy stances are included in the equation. As embodied and enforced in the laws and policies of the land, the rise of

⁹² "Overview : Progressive Era to New Era, 1900-1929 : U.S. History Primary Source Timeline : Classroom Materials at the Library of Congress : Library of Congress." <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/united-states-history-primary-source-timeline/progressive-era-to-new-era-1900-1929/overview/>.

progressive policies and laws effectively implement the separation of the church and the state.

After recognizing the importance of these forces since the Progressive Era and growing trends favoring secularism in the U.S. religious landscape, it is vital to examine progressive policies since more secular communities advocate for them and have contributed to specific legal and political gains that go against religion. The influence secularization has on minimizing the influence of religion in American society is continuously questioned. In turn, by examining multiple landmark Supreme Court decisions on progressive public policy issues that minimize the importance of religion in politics, including education, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights, this political theory paper will argue that progressive policies and laws serve as a force that challenge and implement the concept of separation of church and state.

Literature Review: Compared to other central founders, the views of Thomas Jefferson and James Madison reflect most liberal and progressive views in today's American democracy. The Declaration of Independence reflects Jefferson's belief in the need for independence, liberty, and freedom. Jefferson recognized America's need for the separation of the church and the state in order to thrive, properly function, and sustain a political democracy. The role of the government was to maintain civility, peace and justice. In addition, Jefferson's *Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom* reflected his beliefs that God created the human mind free, and "manifested his supreme will that free it shall remain by making it altogether insusceptible of restraint."⁹³

⁹³ Thomas Jefferson. *Virginia Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom* (1776)

James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance* expresses similar beliefs on religious freedom as Jefferson. In this bill, he stated that morality should stand alone because it is not the government's job to interfere with issues regarding religion. To him, God was the only man who possessed despotism over religious freedom.

Nevertheless, political scientists and scholars have questioned the benefits of the church-state separation in American politics, considering the beliefs of the founders and what they truly intended. Kent Greenawalt was inspired by the book *Separation of Church and State* by Philip Hamburger that addresses the church-state separation. In *History as Ideology: Philip Hamburger's Separation of Church and State.*, Greenawalt addresses three theories about how the idea of separation of the church and the state relates to the First Amendment clause.

First, Greenawalt addresses separation as a core constitutional concept. Greenawalt reflects back to the establishment of religious liberty and how its embracement by the American citizens resulted in destruction of state establishments of religion by 1833.⁹⁴ The lasting impact of these changes has carried on for more than two centuries of American history as a core principle of American political democracy for social reform and establishing progressive policies regarding religion and government. The second story is that separation deviates significantly from disestablishment. This reflects the original intentions of the Bill of Rights, and that the separation of church and state was not the overall priority. Instead, the intention was to embrace the idea that no

⁹⁴ Greenawalt, Kent. 2005. "History as Ideology: Philip Hamburger's Separation of Church and State." California Law Review 93 (1): 367–96.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=bsu&AN=16330762&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

religion should be established or supported. Furthermore, he believes that the intention was to have separation as a restricting force for Catholic power without impeding Protestant connections between religion and government.⁹⁵ The third story is that separation is the product of natural evolutionary development. This concept addresses the fact that “the shift in metaphor from disestablishment to separation teaches us that large political and legal concepts are highly flexible; their connotations and applications change over time.”⁹⁶

Greenawalt acknowledges the thoughts of Hamburger, but he also challenges the theoretical points that Hamburger fails to address. Greenawalt credits Hamburger for defining the history of the concept of separation of church and state as a history of ideology.⁹⁷ For this reason, he believes that Hamburger’s book acknowledges mainly the second story and reflects originalism. Hamburger’s account argues that it was not the First Amendment that separated the church and the state, and that “a robust concept of separation is historically distinct from the more constitutionally legitimate ideal of disestablishment.”⁹⁸ However, to Greenawalt, Hamburger’s work is limited and lacks a full understanding of how the concept of church-state separation was developed. Furthering his defense, Greenawalt stated, “Hamburger paints separation as having vastly different implications for the constitutional law of church and state than the much more modest notion of disestablishment.”

⁹⁵ Greenawalt, Kent. 2005. “History as Ideology: Philip Hamburger’s Separation of Church and State.” *California Law Review* 93 (1): 367–96.
<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=bsu&AN=16330762&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

While Hamburger oversimplifies the relation between the logic of separation and disestablishment, Greenawalt comes to a deeper conclusion. First, he concludes that all political and legal ideas shift over time. These shifts are reflected in both how people understand the ideas and in what they regard as their proper applications.⁹⁹ Second, he concludes that regardless of these shifts, all political and legal concepts overlap with other political and legal concepts.¹⁰⁰ Third, he concludes that “at any stage of history, people advance versions of ideals that are more or less uncompromising, depending on the other values these people hold.”¹⁰¹

Moving forward, this religious-secular debate around the lack of separation of the church and the state in American democracy has led to what David T. Buckley considers a “secularism trap,”¹⁰² in *Beyond the Secularism Trap: Religion, Political Institutions, and Democratic Commitments*. Buckley’s theory suggests that the religious-secular debate threatens the viability of democracy and its ability to thrive, and he blames institutional ties between religion and state for this juxtaposition. David E. Campbell contributes to these beliefs of the impact of institutional ties between religion and state.

In *The Perils of Politicized Religion*, Campbell states that many believe religious disaffiliation is a backlash to religious rights.¹⁰³ He suggests that politics are shaping

⁹⁹ Greenawalt, Kent. 2005. “History as Ideology: Philip Hamburger’s Separation of Church and State.” *California Law Review* 93 (1): 367–96. <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=ip,shib&db=bsu&AN=16330762&site=ehost-live&scope=site>.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Buckley, David T. “Beyond the Secularism Trap: Religion, Political Institutions, and Democratic Commitments.” *Comparative Politics* 47, no. 4 (2015): 439–58. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43664159>.

¹⁰³ Campbell, David E. “The Perils of Politicized Religion.” *Daedalus* 149, no. 3 (2020): 87–104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48590942>.

many Americans' religious views. Despite James Madison's contributions to religious liberty, he also wanted to protect religion from the corruption of politics, and Campbell's assessments reflect the ways in which politics negatively impact religion. According to Campbell, many Americans are abandoning religion because they see it as an extension of politics with which they disagree. Campbell stated, "The politicization of religion not only contributes to greater political polarization, it diminishes the ability of religious leaders to speak prophetically on important public issues."¹⁰⁴ While public issues have been affected by secularization, Campbell also addresses a shift in the percentage of religious believers who objected to immoral private behavior by politicians before Donald Trump's presidential candidacy. Now, such behaviors are dismissed as irrelevant to their ability to act ethically in their public role.

Mary Doak dives into the idea of secularization's privatization of religion in *Defining Our Dilemma: Must Secularization Privatize Religion?* Doak examines the appropriate role of religion in public life, and how it is questioned due to secularization. While some believe that political religiosity is a good thing, others argue that it contradicts religious freedom. As she explored this idea, she was unable to decide whether secularization necessarily privatizes religion, considering that the United States lacks a standard description of our form of government's basic structures; religion remains both a social and political force.¹⁰⁵ However, according to Pew Research Organization, survey evidence proves that many Americans believe that religion is

¹⁰⁴ Campbell, David E. "The Perils of Politicized Religion." *Daedalus* 149, no. 3 (2020): 87-104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48590942>.

¹⁰⁵ Doak, Mary. "Defining Our Dilemma: Must Secularization Privatize Religion?" *American Journal of Theology & Philosophy* 29, no. 3 (2008): 253-70. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27944448>.

losing influence. They stated, “Four-in-ten U.S. adults say there is at least some conflict between their own religious beliefs and mainstream American culture.”¹⁰⁶

While author Mary Doak was unsure whether secularization necessarily privatizes religion, scholars like Richard Neuhaus believe it does. In fear of secularization's contribution to “the Naked Public Square,” Neuhaus willingly considers the Naked Public Square a very dangerous place for minorities,¹⁰⁷ and he views secularization in a negative light. He believes it threatens democracy and denies religious citizens a legitimate voice for expressing their values. This limits their ability to express concerns about secularization's impact on the moral standards society shares upon which ordered liberty rests. Neuhaus cautions that his regard is not to stimulate “old questions” about whether religion and politics should be entangled because that entanglement at one point or another is inevitable. Instead, the question he emphasizes is “whether we can devise forms for that interaction which can revive rather than destroy the liberal democracy that is required by a society that would be pluralistic and free.”¹⁰⁸

Neuhaus furthers his assessment alongside authors Tom Flynn and Kenneth D. Roseman in *The Debate over Secularism*. The main focus of this article was Wilfred M. McClay who believes that the separation of church and state does not necessarily mean the separation of religion from public life. He substantiates this by saying that the founders expressed the need for religion to be a force in public life, as a part of public

¹⁰⁶ “Views about Religion in American Society,” December 17, 2020.
<https://www.pewforum.org/2020/03/12/views-about-religion-in-american-society/>.

¹⁰⁷ Flynn, Tom, Richard John Neuhaus, and Kenneth D. Roseman. “The Debate over Secularism.” *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 24, no. 4 (2000): 4-6. Accessed August 5, 2021.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/40260104>.

¹⁰⁸ Neuhaus, Richard John. *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984.

discourse affecting the public sphere.¹⁰⁹ Tom Flynn starts by referencing Wilfred M. McClay's *Two Concepts of Secularism*. McClay's attempt to restore religion to the public square consists of two concepts; first concept of "positive secularism" and the second concept of "negative secularism." He clarifies that "positive secularism," which McClay least favors, aims to equip public life with religious-free "buffer zones"¹¹⁰ where religious and nonreligious citizens feel assured that no "alien faith, not even that of the majority,"¹¹¹ will impair the quality of that encounter. According to Flynn, it "assures that no single creed's idiosyncratic moral concepts will unduly dominate public-policy debates, and that the government can go about the people's business untroubled by the strife of sects."¹¹²

Further, McClay's concept of "negative secularism" is "tempered by external values derived from faith"¹¹³ and favors Judeo-Christian understandings of human nature as an endowment from God.¹¹⁴ Because of increasing religious diversity, McClay is suggesting a "Christian yoke"¹¹⁵ upon society when determining if the public square is naked enough. Flynn considers McClay's concept a "sectarian interference in public debate"¹¹⁶ because it excludes minority viewpoints. Kenneth D. Roseman agrees with Flynn on what McClay fails to acknowledge and considers the restraint that negative

¹⁰⁹ McClay, Dr. Wilfred M. "Religion & Secularism: The American Experience." The Faith Angle Forum. Accessed August 5, 2021. <https://faithangle.org/wp-content/uploads/Religion-and-Secularism-Abridged.pdf>.

¹¹⁰ Flynn, Tom, Richard John Neuhaus, and Kenneth D. Roseman. "The Debate over Secularism." *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 24, no. 4 (2000): 4-6. Accessed August 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40260104>.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

secularism imposes frightening. According to Roseman, "McClay's article would have been more satisfying if he had admitted that there is a sizable constituency of Americans for whom secularism is an anathema, and religion a vehicle to negate and eliminate anyone who does not agree with the worldview they so militantly propagate."¹¹⁷

On the other hand, Neuhaus agrees with McClay's concepts in relation to his own controversial book, *The Naked Public Square*. He contributes two considerations to McClay's concepts. In the words of Neuhaus, "the contemporary success of secular elites in using the courts to impose a definition of social and moral reality in conflict with the lived experience of almost all Americans"¹¹⁸ is credited for the failed attempt to create a naked public square. He also strengthens McClay's argument by adding that religion, and particularly, the Judeo-Christian moral tradition, provides more security, protection and inclusion of secularist dissenters than secularist dissenters are able to provide for religious believers.¹¹⁹

Furthermore, in *Unpacking secularization: Structural changes, individual choices and ethnic paths*, Guy Ben-Porat and Yariv Feniger explore the influence of secularizing forces, the impact of these forces, the types of forces, and the different paths of secularization that are produced as a result. They believe that the complexity of secularization is a multidimensional process that consists of different sets of identities,

¹¹⁷ Flynn, Tom, Richard John Neuhaus, and Kenneth D. Roseman. "The Debate over Secularism." *The Wilson Quarterly* (1976-) 24, no. 4 (2000): 4-6. Accessed August 5, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40260104>.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

practices, and values. This belief replaces the common perception that secularization is a linear progression in which religion disappears. To conclude their findings, the authors state, "While for some ethnic groups secularization happens alongside a significant change in beliefs, practices and behaviors, for others religion remains significant and secularization is more partial, especially when measured in liberal values."¹²⁰

In *The Religious-Secular Divide: The U.S. Case* by Sheila Greeve Davaney, Davaney addresses the idea of secularization's privatization of religion and other similar theories within this field of study. Davaney addresses theories claiming religion and secularity are two separate and distinct opposing spheres. The author also addresses predictions about how secularism will weaken religion until it disappears or continues into the isolation of private life. Although many political scientists have studied this secularism theory and would agree, Davaney argues the opposite. In this article, she argues that religion has made a "tremendous resurgence across the globe and has moved increasingly into the public arena."¹²¹ While addressing how secularism undermines religious influence, the author disagrees with the magnitude of this impact and its view in a negative light. She credits debates concerning evolution, abortion, the rights of sexual minorities, religious efforts to get out the vote, and faith-based funding by government and philanthropy as the frame of the religious-secular tension which complicates the narrative.

¹²⁰ Ben-Porat, Guy, and Yariv Feniger. "Unpacking Secularization: Structural Changes, Individual Choices and Ethnic Paths." *Ethnicities* 14, no. 1 (2014): 91-112. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24735528>.

¹²¹ Davaney, Sheila Greeve. "The Religious-Secular Divide: The U.S. Case." *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1327-332. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972217>.

To substantiate Davaney's theoretical claims, authors like Noah Feldman and Charles Taylor agree that the religious and the secular are entangled. Feldman argued that the notion of the secular has deep roots in premodern religious history.¹²² By finding relations between the two, it reduces the tensions and complexity of the secular-religious debate. Other scholars and researchers agree with this theory. They believe that there is a need to rethink the terms "secular" and "religious," their history, the relationship between the two, and their concrete embodiment in American life.¹²³ For example, Davaney presented a less opposing perspective suggesting that instead of viewing the secular as not religious, realize that certain religious values and ideas are discovered in secular form and gain more public power as a result.¹²⁴

Moving forward, as a result of a lack of tolerance of secularists in the religious world, secular and atheist communities have marched and created movements based on the theory of secularism progressing in America. As the political landscape continues to shift in favor of secularism, this has led to social conflict in American society. These non-religious groups face criticism, and some believe their influence on religion is obstructive. *Secular Humanism and Atheism beyond Progressive Secularism* by authors Richard Cimino and Christopher Smith examine how "freethinkers" are attempting to become a dominant force in the United States through three different strategies. According to Cimino and Smith, the three strategies include creating a niche for secular humanism among the unchurched and "secular seekers"; mimicking and adapting

¹²² Davaney, Sheila Greeve. "The Religious-Secular Divide: The U.S. Case." *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1327-332. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972217>.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

various aspects of evangelicalism, even as they target this movement as their primary antagonist; and making use of minority discourse and identity politics.¹²⁵

Cimino and Smith explore the idea of "progressive secularism," which is "the dominance of naturalistic and scientific thought over supernatural explanations of reality." Through progressive secularism, the authors present the theory that a secular "kingdom" would emerge as societies threw off a primitive theistic mindset and matured. Since this study, there has undoubtedly been a rise in the secular community, and even then, debates regarding the resurgence of religion in America are present. Nevertheless, the secular community has become more dominant, which has contributed to the rise of secularization. The article argues that the increased focus on "how secularism can survive and even thrive in a religious society has become pressing for atheists and secular humanists, resulting in significant changes in their strategy and self-understanding."¹²⁶

Methodology: To show how progressive policies/laws serve as a force that enforces the separation of the church and the state, dissecting different case studies was beneficial. Analyzing the influence progressive laws have in overriding religion proves the influence policy advocacy has over religion in lawmaking. To obtain a more in-depth understanding, landmark Supreme Court decisions were used as case studies to focus on the relationship between religious freedom and progressive laws,

¹²⁵ Cimino, Richard, and Christopher Smith. "Secular Humanism and Atheism beyond Progressive Secularism." *Sociology of Religion* 68, no. 4 (2007): 407-24. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20453183>.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

specifically regarding education, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights. Qualitative data examined the patterns that occurred within each of these cases.

Overall, databases and online sources provided insight on secularism, progressivism and religion. The Pew Research Organization provided substantial research to contribute to this topic, as well. Other online organizations and websites such as American Progress, Religion and Politics, Constitution Center, and USCourts.gov also support these claims. When looking for landmark Supreme Court cases to include, focusing on policies and laws regarding religious freedom and the First Amendment emphasized the lack of church-state separation. All of the cases presented in this paper, *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014), *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) have faced controversy due to opposing opinions, and sometimes, the prioritization of religion. This research method contributed knowledge and understanding by addressing loopholes within the founding documents, observing the shifting religious landscape, and exploring religious freedom policies.

Presentation and Discussion of Results: The Religious Freedom Restoration Act ensures that interests in religious freedom are protected. With such freedom, the freedom to decide to practice no religion at all is protected. The original intention of the First Amendment was to prevent a national religion from being established and stop the federal government from interfering with establishments of religion in the states. The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment is the first provision concerning religion.

Under this clause, the government is prohibited from establishing a religion.¹²⁷ However, the vagueness of the First Amendment's Establishment Clause left room for questions and challenges from citizens to purify and mitigate any corruption within the founding documents. Consequently, the First Amendment is used in today's society to keep religion out of government spaces such as public schools, libraries, and courtrooms.¹²⁸ These enforcements are reflected in multiple Supreme Court decisions that have further separated church and state.

The other clause of the First Amendment concerning religion is the Free Exercise Clause. It grants the freedom of conscience and protects religious liberty. Under this clause, governmental regulation of religious beliefs, invasions by civil authority, and misuse of secular governmental programs are prohibited.¹²⁹ As a result, citizens are free to practice any religion of their choice, but it may not run afoul of a "public morals" or a "compelling" governmental interest.¹³⁰ However, research suggests that in more recent years, the Court reflects a willingness to hold that some religiously motivated conduct is protected from generally applicable prohibitions.¹³¹

¹²⁷ "First Amendment and Religion." United States Courts. <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/first-amendment-and-religion>.

¹²⁸ "Engel v. Vitale (1962)." Bill of Rights Institute. Accessed April 10, 2021. <https://billofrightsinstitute.org/e-lessons/engel-v-vitale-1962>.

¹²⁹ McConnell, and Marshall. "Free Exercise Clause: OVERVIEW: Constitution Annotated: CONGRESS.GOV: Library of Congress." Constitution Annotated. https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/amdt1_1_4_1/.

¹³⁰ "First Amendment and Religion." United States Courts. <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/first-amendment-and-religion>.

¹³¹ McConnell, and Marshall. "Free Exercise Clause: OVERVIEW: Constitution Annotated: CONGRESS.GOV: Library of Congress." Constitution Annotated. https://constitution.congress.gov/browse/essay/amdt1_1_4_1/.

Cultural wars have been the catalyst for revising and analyzing specific policies within the founding documents. In fact, authors and political scientists have expressed how such landmark Supreme Court decisions have led much of mainstream, religious America to “view liberal secularists as elitists who scoffed at the beliefs of the majority and used their power and influence to impose a secular culture on the country.”¹³² A series of case studies validate the argument that progressive laws and policies that have been enforced and justified by the founding documents implement the separation of the church and the state.

Based on the results of Supreme Court decisions on religious freedom, progressive policies regarding education are a force that enforce the separation of the church and the state. First, consider the Supreme Court decision in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962). In this Supreme Court decision, it was ruled that official recitation of prayers in public schools violated the First Amendment’s Establishment Clause. The First Amendment to the Constitution states that “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion.” Nevertheless, for much of America’s history, public schools recited a nondenominational prayer at the start of the school day, similarly to the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance. In this case specifically, the “Regents’ Prayer” was being recited in New York public schools. The prayer recommended by the New York Board of Regents stated, “Almighty God, we acknowledge our dependence upon Thee, and we beg Thy blessings upon us, our parents, our teachers and our

¹³² "Religion and Roe: The Politics of Exclusion." *Harvard Law Review* 108, no. 2 (1994): 495-500. Accessed March 12, 2021. doi:10.2307/1341902.

Country.”¹³³ While students had the right to remain silent or stand outside the classroom without facing any repercussions, this practice was seen as unconstitutional and, therefore, challenged in the landmark Supreme Court case *Engel v. Vitale*.

It was stated by Justice Hugo Black, “We think that by using its public school system to encourage recitation of the Regents’ prayer, the State of New York has adopted a practice wholly inconsistent with the Establishment Clause...It is no part of the business of government to compose official prayers for any group of the American people to recite as a part of a religious program carried on by government.”¹³⁴ For that reason, the conclusion of this Supreme Court case ruled 6-1 that official recitation of school-sponsored nondenominational prayer in public schools violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.¹³⁵

Similarly, students in Pennsylvania school districts were required to open each school day with the Pledge of Allegiance and a reading from the Bible. During the same year as *Engel v. Vitale*, it was ruled in *Abington School District v. Schempp* that school-sponsored Bible reading and/or recitation of the Lord’s prayer before class is unconstitutional.

When analyzing progressive laws regarding education, the separation of the church and the state was enforced by restricting religious practices for the sake of equality and avoiding religious intolerance. Today, it is considered unconstitutional to

¹³³ “Engel v. Vitale (1962).” Bill of Rights Institute. Accessed April 10, 2021.
<https://billofrightsinstitute.org/e-lessons/engel-v-vitale-1962>.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ “Facts and Case Summary - Engel v. Vitale.” United States Courts. Accessed April 10, 2021.
<https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/facts-and-case-summary-engel-v-vitale>.

teach religion in a public school or recite prayers. However, with religious freedom, one still possesses their freedom to recite religious prayers privately. Considering that it would be challenging to include all religions in the public school curriculums, and today, many people do not identify with any religion at all, the decision to not publicly address any religions at all would be considered the most politically correct solution. The defense behind this solution was that despite the prayers being nondenominational, children are easily influenced. This could result in school-sponsored prayers influencing children to embrace a religion that neither their parents nor they would otherwise choose.¹³⁶ Essentially, this outcome would be religion imposed on citizens due to a lack of church-state separation. In 1971, a three-prong criteria was developed during a similar case regarding education. It was established by the Supreme Court. The goal of this criteria was to avoid church-state entanglement.

Moving forward, different policies regarding women's rights have had more challenging fights toward implementing the separation of the church and the state in American politics. One can analyze the U.S. Supreme Court decision in *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby (2014)* regarding the prioritization placed on intersecting the church and the state. In this case, religious rights were prioritized over human rights. Many citizens viewed this as a threat to women's rights but a win for religious rights. The Christian-owned corporation, Hobby Lobby, was against providing contraceptives supported under the Affordable Care Act to their employees because of the corporation's religious views. In support of their religious beliefs as a religious corporation, the employer

¹³⁶ "Facts and Case Summary - Engel v. Vitale." United States Courts. Accessed April 10, 2021. <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/facts-and-case-summary-engel-v-vitale>.

denied insurance coverage for contraception to employees covered under the Affordable Health Care Act.

At the conclusion of the case, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that the contraceptive mandate promulgated under the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act violated privately held for-profit corporations' right to religious freedom.¹³⁷ This was a close ruling (5-4) supporting Hobby Lobby which was justified under the Religious Freedom Restoration Act that resulted in an exemption for privately held, for-profit organizations like Hobby Lobby. As a result, these organizations were not required to comply with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services contraception mandate, requiring employer-provided health insurance plans to offer their beneficiaries certain contraceptive methods free of charge.¹³⁸ Regardless, this led to immense controversy and consideration for the privacy rights of their employees and women's rights, specifically.

Additionally, abortion rights have been continuously challenged by progressives, conservatives, and religion overall, but there have been greater political gains in this realm of women's rights. Since the Women's Suffrage Movement during the Progressive Era, women's rights have been analyzed. One of the most renowned rulings, the *Roe v. Wade* (1973) Supreme Court case, substantiates such claims. In the year of 1970 in Texas, it was considered a felony to abort a fetus unless "on medical

¹³⁷ "The Embryo Project Encyclopedia." Burwell v. Hobby Lobby (2014) | The Embryo Project Encyclopedia. Accessed April 15, 2021. <https://embryo.asu.edu/pages/burwell-v-hobby-lobby-2014>.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

advice for the purpose of saving the life of the mother.”¹³⁹ Jane Roe was the fictional name used in court documents to protect the identity of a pregnant Texas resident who sued Henry Wade, the district attorney of Dallas County at the time. She argued that the law was unconstitutional because it violated the guarantee of personal liberty and the right to privacy implicitly guaranteed in the First, Fourth, Fifth, Ninth, and 14th Amendments.¹⁴⁰

Justice Harry Blackmun spoke on behalf of the majority which ruled (7-2) by stating, “We ... acknowledge our awareness of the sensitive and emotional nature of the abortion controversy, of the vigorous opposing views, even among physicians, and of the deep and seemingly absolute convictions that the subject inspires.”¹⁴¹ This case resulted in the U.S. Supreme Court decision to invalidate all state laws that prohibited first trimester abortions, and a pregnant woman’s choice whether to have an abortion (only within her first trimester) is protected in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as a fundamental “right to privacy” and cannot be regulated by the state.

When analyzing progressive laws on women’s rights regarding abortion, the separation of the church and the state was enforced for the sake of the right to privacy granted in the founding documents. While many American citizens do not view abortion as fundamentally religious, many do. As a result, many religious groups/citizens have argued that *Roe v. Wade* contradicts religion. However, numerous Christian

¹³⁹ Landmark Supreme Court Cases (555) 123-4567, landmarkcases.dcwdbeta.com. “Cases - Roe v. Wade.” Landmark Supreme Court Cases. Accessed April 10, 2021. <https://www.landmarkcases.org/cases/roe-v-wade>.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

denominations and religious groups agree that the bible does *not* condemn abortion and that abortion should continue to be legal.

These Christian denominations and religious groups include American Baptist Churches-USA, American Ethical Union, American Friends (Quaker) Service Committee, American Jewish Congress, Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), Episcopal Church, Lutheran Women's Caucus, Moravian Church in America-Northern Province, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Union of American Hebrew Congregations, Unitarian Universalist Association, United Church of Christ, United Methodist Church, United Synagogue of America, Women's Caucus Church of the Brethren, YWCA, Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, Catholics for Free Choice, and Evangelicals for Choice.¹⁴² These beliefs of the supporting religious citizens within American democracy validate the need for separation of the church and the state which was implemented in this Supreme Court decision.

A similar acceptance is reflected in regards to the LGBTQ community. The Pew Research Organization reported that most U.S. Christian groups are becoming more accepting of homosexuality, even by some members of churches that strongly view homosexual relationships as sinful. Along with the shifting religious landscape, these views are driven mainly by the youth of the Christian-American population. Furthermore, 54 percent of Christians in the U.S. now say that homosexuality should be accepted,

¹⁴² Seering, Lauryn. "What Does the Bible Say About Abortion? - Freedom From Religion Foundation." Freedom From Religion Foundation - Freedom From Religion Foundation. Accessed April 16, 2021. <https://ffrf.org/component/k2/item/26087-abortion-noncontract>.

rather than discouraged, by society.¹⁴³ LGBTQ rights have received much more support in today's society compared to the opposition and criticism the community has faced in the past for religious reasons.

The U.S. Supreme Court decision *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) was viewed as a significant political gain for LGBTQ rights. This case arose due to the states of Michigan, Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee defining *marriage* as a union between one man and one woman. Fourteen same-sex couples and two men whose same-sex partners are deceased considered this a violation of the Fourteenth Amendment by denying them the right to marry or have their marriages, lawfully performed in another State, given full recognition. These suits were filed in United States District Courts in their home States. Their intentions were to be granted the freedom to marry someone of the same sex and have their marriages deemed lawful on the same terms and conditions as marriages between persons of the opposite sex. It was concluded that each state violated the Equal Protection Clause and Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment, and each District Court ruled in favor of same-sex couples.¹⁴⁴

Another debate within the LGBTQ community that challenges church-state intersection is more recent in the Supreme Court decision on *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020). In this case, a gay man, Gerald Bostock, was fired simply because of his sexual orientation. However, this termination wasn't immediate. In fact, Bostock had been working for Clayton County, Georgia, as a child welfare services coordinator since

¹⁴³ Murphy, Caryle. "More U.S. Christians OK with Homosexuality." Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, August 17, 2020. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/12/18/most-u-s-christian-groups-grow-more-accepting-of-homosexuality/>.

¹⁴⁴ 576 U. S. OBERGEFELL v. HODGES (2015) Opinion of the Court.

2003, working for a total of ten years before his termination from the company. Overall, he was evaluated based on his performance and applauded on several occasions for his work ethic. The positive reinforcement shifted when Bostock's sexual orientation was exposed after his participation in a gay recreational softball league in 2013. He was taunted for his sexual orientation in the presence of his supervisor, and an internal audit of the program funds he managed was conducted. Within a short period of time, Bostock was allegedly terminated for "conduct unbecoming of its employees."¹⁴⁵

At the conclusion of this case, the judges ruled in Bostock's favor. It was justified under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which protects employees and job applicants from employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin.¹⁴⁶ As a result of this enforcement, an employer is prohibited from discriminating against an individual on the basis of sexual orientation. Although Title VII does not explicitly state the violation based on sexual orientation, the majority justified this Title VII violation in regard to the employer intentionally firing the individual employee based on sex.¹⁴⁷

When analyzing this Supreme Court decision on progressive laws regarding LGBTQ rights, statistics have proven that the separation of the church and the state is enforced for the sake of equality. To deny a person's rights based on their sexual orientation is unjustifiable in relation to the freedom and equality granted in the founding documents. The reason such discrimination has been justifiable in the past is because

¹⁴⁵ "Bostock v. Clayton County (2020)." Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2019/17-1618>.

¹⁴⁶ "Protections Against Discrimination and Other Prohibited Practices." Federal Trade Commission, May 1, 2019. <https://www.ftc.gov/site-information/no-fear-act/protections-against-discrimination>.

¹⁴⁷ "Bostock v. Clayton County (2020)." Oyez. <https://www.oyez.org/cases/2019/17-1618>.

of the intersection of the church and the state. Despite the Bill of Rights and other political enforcements of religious freedom, religion has still been used to justify discriminatory actions. Nevertheless, the loopholes within the documents allow for social reform.

Discussion/Conclusion: By examining multiple landmark Supreme Court decisions on progressive issues that minimize the importance of religion in politics, such as education, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights, one can see how progressive policies and laws are forces that implement the concept of separation of church and state. Further implications consider secularism a driving force in relation to political philosophies in politics. The controversy about secularism in American democracy is that the separation of church and state has not always promoted the separation of religion from public life. Nevertheless, religious citizens should not have to privatize their faith to the point that they cannot fully participate in the public square. If the state enforced the First Amendment to rid the culture of its religiosity, it would be a violation of the fundamental rights of religious believers. In fact, the founders encouraged the right to open dialogue in a society, and the Naked Public Square is conflicting.

Without religion's historical influence in America, there would be no religious-secular debate, because secular morality is often a result of religious ideas. Morality plays a big role in a self-governing republic, and the importance of morality was established during the founding generation. The government makes laws that are vested in questions of morality. Certain freedoms have been regulated on levels of morality, but mainly concerning religious definitions of ethics. Supreme Court decisions on *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Roe v. Wade* (1973), *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014),

Obergefell v. Hodges (2015), and Bostock v. Clayton County (2020) in the area of religious freedom substantiates this historical analysis.

Modern-day dilemmas often lead to revisions and reform of policy issues in order to determine fair and justifiable solutions. Therefore, social and legal changes in American society will continue to arise in response to vast changes brought about by modernization. Secularists have been credited for undermining religious influence by encouraging people to look at the “validated discoveries of science”¹⁴⁸ rather than religion. Although many citizens in America argue that progressive policies and laws undermine religion and will continuously contribute to secularization, these policies are put in place to prevent the establishment of a national religion and violating human rights as the founding documents are intended to do.

While many other religious teachings show intolerance for progressive issues such as divorce, contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage, traditional Christianity is at the forefront when considering specific social issues. Nevertheless, it is crucial to recognize that religious people advocate for these liberal-democratic or progressive issues. Also, it is important to address that a lack of religious affiliation does not necessarily mean that secularists lack morality or the ability to decipher right from wrong. As America evolves, so has moral acceptability due to Americans becoming more liberal/progressive on social issues. Today, views that gay and lesbian relations are morally acceptable, support for same-sex marriage, sexual relations and conception outside of marriage, acceptance of divorce and human embryo medical research, and

¹⁴⁸ “Secularism in America: Secular Progressive Outreach: United States.” Secular Progressive. <https://www.spoutlink.org/>.

polygamy and cloning humans have evolved and are accepted in ways they weren't in the past. While these are all issues that contradict a myriad of religious teachings, these shifts are direct results of further implementation of the separation of the church and the state. Therefore, secularization is more likely to impact democracy by having an even higher percentage of the population that is willing to support more liberal social issues that require more significant separation of the church and the state. The progressive ideologies and secular thought is often associated with Enlightenment liberalism, and it investigates alternatives to political stances or religious beliefs.¹⁴⁹

Needless to say, the religious-secular debate and various theoretical claims reflect the ways in which both communities tend to clash. However, although the religious-secular debate is causing tension between both communities, more often than not, there will be some convergence, cooperation, and mutually held views on important issues. As supported by many scholars, this convergence requires reconsideration on what it means to be secular and what it means to be religious. Instead of making the two opposing forces, we must recognize the ways in which they complement each other and intersect. As addressed in the literature review, recognizing the symmetry between secular and religious minded citizens allows people to realize that certain religious values and ideas are discovered in secular form and gain more public power as a result.¹⁵⁰ Concluding with the words of Neuhaus, "We can remember that our deeper stake is not in the policy specifics-- but in the larger movement of liberal democracy that

¹⁴⁹ "Secularism in America: Secular Progressive Outreach: United States." Secular Progressive. <https://www.spoutlink.org/>.

¹⁵⁰ Davaney, Sheila Greeve. "The Religious-Secular Divide: The U.S. Case." *Social Research* 76, no. 4 (2009): 1327-332. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40972217>.

makes both possible and necessary the continuing redefinition of partisan positions and postures.”¹⁵¹ A mutual respect for the faith or lack of faith within the religious and secular communities is not an act of toleration but a necessity in order to reflect equality in the public arena beyond the Court and the First Amendment.

¹⁵¹ Neuhaus, Richard John. *The Naked Public Square: Religion and Democracy in America*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1984.

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Conclusion

This thesis explored secularity in America, the religious landscape, what that means for contemporary American politics and the future of American politics, the intentions of the founding fathers during the beginning of the republic, and how it is possible for people of all religions and people with no religion to coexist in American democracy. Based on the actual writings of the founding fathers and the work of Alexis de Tocqueville as well as that of contemporary scholars, this analysis found that American culture and religion can coexist in a secular democracy under a secular political system.

Chapter one, *A Secular or Entangled Democracy*, determined that the founding fathers did not intend for America to be a secular republic despite non-establishment. The literature review explored the beliefs of the founding fathers. Founder of Providence and author of the first articles of incorporation, Roger Williams, envisioned that religious society and civil society would be two separate entities in order to avoid confusion, reasoning that the government is not within the sphere of civil jurisdiction.¹⁵² Lord Baltimore, who founded Maryland, believed that citizens should not be punished for their religious beliefs. Founder of Pennsylvania, William Penn, accepted people of all religious denominations as long as they belonged to one (which proves he would be disappointed by the current religious landscape). He advocated for non-coercion of

¹⁵² Fisher, Louis *Religious Liberty In America: Political Safeguards*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

conscience and the cooperation of the church and state in fostering levels of morality which he believed was necessary for prosperity and good government.¹⁵³

John Locke led many of the founders. He advocated for toleration, and he reasoned that treating people harshly with cruel punishments out of intolerance of their religious beliefs did not align with the Christian religion.¹⁵⁴ Thomas Jefferson advocated for independence, and he believed that religious liberty highlighted an appropriate separation of the church and the state. He recognized that there are no positive results that come from forcing religious views on American citizens. James Madison believed that God is king. With that, clergy and no other authorities or secular communities possessed despotism over religious freedom since church-state relations did not contribute to civil society or even Christianity. Alexander Hamilton and George Washington believed that morality must fall with religion.

One of the leading factors that Alexis de Tocqueville recognized in America's ability to sustain a stable democracy was due to church-mindedness and religious mores. Since Tocqueville's observations of America, times have changed along with the demographics. The beliefs of the founding fathers prove that some of Tocqueville's observations were accurate considering the founding generation. However, he was wrong in denying the theories presented by the figures of the Enlightenment that predicted that as knowledge, science, rationality expands, religion weakens. With a combination of greater access through knowledge physically, institutionally, and digitally, along with rationality and liberalism, religious aspects of American politics are

¹⁵³ Fisher, Louis *Religious Liberty In America: Political Safeguards*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2002.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

weaker. Tocqueville was also wrong in his belief that humans are naturally religious, and today's political landscape proves this to be true.

Common views amongst the founders suggested that without liberty, religion will not thrive in America. Nevertheless, liberalism is being impacted by secularization in today's society. Because of religious liberty which most of the founders supported, the changing religious landscape is favoring secularity and affecting American democracy as a result. The secular community is following the lead of their predecessors in terms of their bravery and advocacy, although today's religious landscape does not reflect the founders' original vision. The founding fathers intended for American politics to be secular in the sense of non-establishment, and eventually, complete separation between the church and the state. Chapter one found that while the Founders may not have intended for religious liberty and non-establishment to cause the United States to lose its religious influence within the republic, the history and beginnings that Tocqueville acknowledged and admired in American society have also changed the trajectory and found new meaning in today's society.

Moving forward, chapter two, *American Politics in a Secular Democracy*, explored the importance of trends favoring secularism. It researched trends including increasing atheism in American society while mentioning the Constitutional provisions against religious tests. Research determined that an increasing number of non-religious Americans are openly addressing their lack of religious affiliation. Surveys and statistical data reflect just how swift these changes in the religious landscape are happening. Statistics reflect that 35% of adult millennials who are Americans born between 1981 and 1996 are religiously unaffiliated. This unaffiliated portion of citizens are referred to

as religious “nones” which are citizens practicing atheism or agnosticism, or whose religion is “nothing in particular.”¹⁵⁵ Additionally, religious “nones” are more likely to identify as atheist over the years, and studies have proven that the percentage of “nones” who do not believe in God increased by 50 percent over the course of seven years.

The No Religious Test Clause under Article VI, Section 3 of the Constitution makes it illegal and a violation of the Constitution to impose any religious test on government officials. Further, the Declaration of Independence cites the creator as the bestower of unalienable rights, yet, the Constitution also guarantees freedom of religion. A combination of religiosity, secularism, othering, advocacy priority, partisanship, and religious affiliation are expected to condition the future of American politics in a secularly dominated democracy. With that being said, despite the fact that religion has been embedded in American politics even before the founding of the Republic, the trends favoring secularism in the religious landscape will become more accepted. Advocacy priority is contributing to this acceptance. When policy stances are being evaluated, the importance of religious affiliation weakens. Considering the fact that the younger population of American demographics are already less religious and/or lack religious affiliation, their secular views will likely be passed down to future generations. The generations to come are the future of American politics, and they will highly influence faith in the new millennium.

¹⁵⁵ Lipka, Michael. “Millennials Increasingly Are Driving Growth of 'Nones'.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, May 12, 2015.

Lastly, chapter three, *Progressive Implementations in the Church-State Separation*, determined that secular politics have already begun dominating democracy and enforcing the separation of the church and the state. It focused on social and legal changes in American society. Throughout the literature review, a series of authors support the ways in which secularism undermines religious influence while others view secularization in a negative light because it threatens democracy. America's critical documents are referenced and respected in today's society to keep religion out of government spaces. Although many other religious teachings show intolerance for divorce, contraception, abortion, and same-sex marriage, traditional Christianity is at the forefront of considering specific social issues. However, progressivism and policy advocacy enforce church state separation. The rulings in a series of Supreme Court decisions were used to prove that progressive policies and laws serve as a force that challenge and implement the concept of separation of church and state.

Education was proven to undermine religious influence in the Supreme Court decisions on *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963). In these cases religious practices on school grounds were restricted for the sake of equality and avoiding religious intolerance. In *Engel v. Vitale* (1962), it was ruled that official recitation of prayers in public schools violated the First Amendment's Establishment Clause. In *Abington School District v. Schempp* (1963), the court decided that school-sponsored Bible reading and/or recitation of the Lord's prayer before class is unconstitutional.

Women's rights were proven to undermine religious influence in the Supreme Court decisions on *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014), *Roe v. Wade* (1973). In these

cases, the separation of the church and the state was enforced for the sake of the right to privacy granted in the founding documents. The decision on *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby* (2014) left citizens in an uproar about the privacy rights of their employees and women's rights, specifically, when the religious employer was not required to support the distribution of oral contraceptives in their employees' healthcare. In *Roe v. Wade* (1973), the court invalidated all state laws that prohibited first trimester abortions, and a pregnant woman's choice whether to have an abortion (only within her first trimester). This was protected in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment as a fundamental "right to privacy" that could not be regulated by the state.

In the Supreme Court decisions in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) and *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020), LGBTQ rights were proven to undermine religious influence. *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) resulted in the freedom for citizens to marry someone of the same sex and have their marriages deemed lawful on the same terms and conditions as marriages between persons of the opposite sex. After *Bostock v. Clayton County* (2020) employers today are prohibited from discriminating against an individual on the basis of sexual orientation which is protected under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Based on the findings in chapter one, American society is experiencing a transitional time where liberalism is being impacted by secularization, and trends favoring secularism are expected to increase. Moreover, this chapter declared that there is room and privilege for American citizens to choose secularism based on the original intentions of the republic, although it is the subversion of the founders' intentions. Because of religious liberty, the changing religious landscape is favoring secularism and

affecting American democracy as a result. While the founding fathers advocated for non-establishment to allow religion and politics to flourish separately, the lack of an established church in America has allowed citizens to explore and choose from all religious groups which also left room for people to decline certain religions and/or choose to practice no religion at all. It even gave the religious population of America a chance to separate their personal and religious beliefs from their political views.

The founders paved the way for researchers who have contributed to what religious liberty means today. Although many of the founders supported religious freedom, their beliefs and reverence for religious influence in the republic would imply that they would not be accepting of secularists and today's trends favoring secularism within the religious landscape. It was established that culture wars and threats against liberalism are weakening religious influence in American politics. Religious liberty has, in fact, carried over into today's society, but it is influenced by secularism. While the findings of this chapter both complement and contradict the observations of Tocqueville, religious liberty in today's society substantiates Tocqueville's belief that people living in democratic times could be very prone to reject religious authority.

Based on the findings in chapter two, it is confirmed that by shrinking other religious affiliations and creating space for policy stances that override religion, atheism and/or non-religious affiliation could in fact coexist with American politics. With more generations to come and previous generations exercising their rights to change their religious affiliation or decline religion altogether, research suggests that secular politics may dominate American democracy. With that being said, as the religious landscape continues to change in the country, American democracy can expect the political

landscape to increase in secular politicians and leaders and citizens that will willingly vote for their positions in office.

Further implications suggest that highly religious candidates should attract more support from Republicans and cultural conservatives, while overtly secular candidates should appeal more to Democrats and cultural liberals. Also, the religious citizens in America may gravitate more toward the Republic party while non-religious citizens may gravitate more toward the Democratic party. This is because secular politicians tend to openly advocate for the secular community, and the issues most of them tend to focus on are the separation of government and religion, scientific integrity, reproductive freedom, LGBTQ rights, and civil rights for all Americans. As a result of feeling invisible and/or discriminated against, it is likely that the secular community will come together and focus on policy issues that may go against religion, but align with their beliefs which could become frontline issues in democracy as religious affiliation declines. It is important to caution that these findings are supported by statistical, yet mostly, theoretical data. This study supports the increase in favor of secular politics as a result of the clash between religion and relevant controversial policy issues in modern democracy.

Moreover, by examining multiple landmark Supreme Court decisions on progressive issues that minimize the importance of religion in politics, including education, women's rights, and LGBTQ rights, the findings of chapter three reflect how progressive policies and laws serve as a force that challenge and implement the concept of separation of church and state. Through this series of case studies, the focus on legal and social changes in American society that are opposed by traditional

Christianity gives further evidence of the weakening of religious hold on political culture, and the argument that progressive laws and policies that have been enforced and justified by the founding documents implement the separation of the church and the state is validated.

These cases show that as time evolves, claims of hostility to the religious freedom of religious traditionalists to practice and publicly proclaim their religious and moral perspectives are becoming more and more unacceptable and seen as intolerance toward other religious and moral perspectives. America leans more toward Christianity above any other religion, but giving Christianity a position of superiority excludes the validity of other religions, and it is often reflected in public policy. The religious-secular debate requires a mutual respect for the religious and secular communities in order to reflect equality in the public arena beyond the Court and the First Amendment. Instead of making the two opposing forces, we must recognize the ways in which they complement each other and intersect. Nevertheless, as more progressive issues have their day in the Court, it is important to continue to enforce church-state separation because citizens have the right to choose any religious affiliation (including non-affiliation) without any intentional or unintentional influences from the government.

The findings of each of the chapters combined indicate a need for recommendations for political reform. According to the beliefs of the founding generation, religion will not thrive in America's political system without liberalism. It is essential to understand that centuries have passed, and the religious and political landscapes have been impacted due to these evolutions. With evolution, continued

religious freedom, and the increase of secularization, some citizens do not hold the same religious values or even have reverence for religious aspects of American culture.

Because religious people also advocate for these liberal-democratic or progressive issues, and a lack of religious affiliation does not necessarily mean that secularists lack morality or the ability to decipher right from wrong, moral acceptability in America is continuously evolving. Therefore, secularization is more likely to impact democracy by having an even higher percentage of the population that is willing to support more liberal social issues that require more significant separation of the church and the state. This culminates a need for reconstruction within American politics regarding religion, and it is inevitable. Otherwise, culture wars will continue to expand as secular viewpoints continue to impact religion and threaten liberalism.

Ultimately, the changing religious landscape necessitates a need for tolerance and acceptance of the religiously unaffiliated portion of America. Rethinking what it means to be secular and religious will subdue the tensions between the religious-secular debate by recognizing the symmetry between the two as a result of convergence, cooperation, and mutually held views on important issues. This will become even more evident if the landscape continues to shift, religious affiliation continues to decline, and advocacy priority weakens the importance of religion in American politics.

Overall, each chapter individually focuses on different aspects of religion's intersection with American politics. As future generations find their place in society, the political and religious landscapes are expected to look even different. Therefore, future scholarship should continue to observe the religious and political landscapes and the

impacts they have on democracy. Scholars have stated that there is no proof as to why the religious landscape is shifting. However, this research suggests that liberalism, policy advocacy, intolerance, and religious liberty are weakening religion overall and have led to secularism as the European conservatives had feared.

In Tocqueville's time in America, he observed the citizens' compliance with Christianity out of genuine belief or fear of being suspected of unbelief. However, in today's time, that fear of being suspected of unbelief has diminished. Today, not all American citizens view religion as indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions, especially in pursuit of equality. Christianity is the primary source of American notions of good and evil, but religion is not needed to enforce laws. With or without religion, some people will still be inclined to do wrong. Morality is common knowledge due to human consciousness, which suggests that laws can still be respected in a secular democracy.

The extensive research and findings of this thesis aims to benefit the current reader, millennials, and every generation following by preparing them for the future of American politics based on the nation's history and today's theoretical data. Nations and their attitudes are primarily shaped by their history, so by examining America's history of the church-state separation and the founding fathers' intentions, this research substantiates claims that despite today's religious and political landscapes. American politics and religion can coexist in our democracy under the established secular political system, and the founding documents support this ability.

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Curriculum Vitae

Tatianna Carpenter

Education

Johns Hopkins University, Washington, D.C. — *Master's Degree*

MA in Government - August 2021

University of Maryland Eastern Shore, Princess Anne, MD — *Bachelor's Degree*

BA in English - May 2019

Experience Overview

- 1.5 years of experience in tutoring at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore
- 3 years of experience in mentoring and assistant teaching at Rowan University
- Entry-level reporting and news writing experience at WBOC-TV and WMDT-TV

Professional Presentations

- Mid-Atlantic Writing Centers Association (MAWCA) Conference
Lafayette College in Easton, PA - 03/23/19
- The National Association of Black Accountants (NABA)
University of Maryland Eastern Shore in Princess Anne, MD - 04/10/19

Memberships

Philadelphia Association of Black Journalists • National Association of Black Journalists
• Mid-Atlantic Writing Center Association • Sigma Tau Delta Honor Society